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ABSTRACT

Intended to provide rationales for the use of a group of controversial books in American public schools, this manual explains the educational values of 33 of the most frequently challenged books. Detailed rationales include such information as historical perspective, literary elements, pertinence, and thematic content. Some of the titles include the following: "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn"; "Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl"; "Black Like Me"; "Brave New World"; "The Catcher in the Rye"; "The Chocolate War"; "Deliverance"; "The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test"; "A Farewell to Arms"; "Forever"; "Go Ask Alice"; "The Good Earth"; "The Grapes of Wrath"; "A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich"; "If Beale Street Could Talk"; "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings"; "It's OK If You Don't Love Me"; "Johnny Got His Gun"; "The Learning Tree"; "Lord of the Flies"; "Love Story"; "Manchild in the Promised Land"; "My Darling, My Hamburger"; "Nineteen Eighty-Four"; "Of Mice and Men"; "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich"; "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest"; "Ordinary People"; "Our Bodies, Ourselves"; "The Scarlet Letter"; "A Separate Peace"; "Slaughterhouse Five"; and "To Kill A Mockingbird." The book ends with an essay, "The Censor Within," by Marion Dane Bauer. The results of a 1982 national survey of 862 high school librarians concerning challenged books is included. (EL)

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CELEBRATING
CENSORED
BOOKS

Edited by

Nicholas J. Karolides

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INTRODUCTION

This volume is an effort to provide rationales for the use of a group of controversial books in American public schools. The word rationale is a term that is increasingly used to refer to the purposes and values for selecting a given work. A number of college or university teachers, a high school teacher and a writer of children's literature have attempted in this volume to explain the values of some of the most frequently challenged books used in American public schools.

This project was initiated by the Committee Against Censorship of the National Council of Teachers of English. The Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English has agreed to publish this book. The ideas expressed by various writers in this book are their own. The Committee Against Censorship and the WCTE have provided a forum for the free expression of ideas, without necessarily implying endorsement. We hope the users of this book will find the material supportive of their selections; they may wish to complement this material by further reading. The titles covered in this book are the ones which appeared most frequently in several surveys of school censorship problems between 1965 and 1982. The various titles reported as the objects of attack in the six surveys were collated and the thirty most frequently challenged titles became the subject of this book. The six surveys were as follows:

1. Censorship and the Teachers of English, by Nyla Jean Herber Ahrens. This was a doctoral dissertation at Teachers College, Columbia University, 1965. Nyla Ahrens surveyed a sample of members of the National Council of Teachers of English. Her report listed, among many other matters, the books which her respondents reported as objects of challenge.
2. The report of the joint NCTE AASL Committees on Censorship, 1966. This report was written by Lee Burress and has not been published. Copies are on file at the NCTE office and the library of the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point. The report was based on a survey of a national sample of school librarians and English Department chairpersons. A number of titles are listed in the report as objects of attack.
3. In 1973 Lee Burress surveyed a national sample of secondary school English department chairpersons concerning problems of censorship. A report of this survey was published by the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English as Service Bulletin #15. That report also contained a list of frequently challenged books.
4. In 1977 Lee Burress surveyed a national sample of secondary school teachers who were members of NCTE. The results of that survey were published as Chapter 2 in Dealing With Censorship (published by NCTE in 1979).
5. In 1981 three organizations carried out a nationwide survey of censorship problems. The organizations involved were: Association of American Publishers, Inc., American Library Association, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Through the assistance of Michelle Kamhi, a detailed list of the challenged titles was made available.
6. In 1982 Lee Burress and David Burress surveyed a national sample of high school librarians. That survey also produced a list of frequently challenged books. On the basis of these six national surveys of censorship pressures on the American public schools between 1965 and 1982, it seems likely that the most frequently challenged books are these:

    1. The Catcher in the Rye
    2. Go Ask Alice
    3. Of Mice and Men
    4. The Grapes of Wrath
    5. 1984
    6. Lord of the Flies
    7. Forever
    8. Our Bodies, Ourselves
    9. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
    10. To Kill A Mockingbird
    11. Brave New World
    12. Love Story
    13. Manchild in the Promised Land
    14. The Learning Tree
    15. Slaughterhouse Five
    16. Black Like Me
    17. One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich
    18. My Darling, My Hamburger
    19. One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest
    20. A Separate Peace
    21. The Scarlet Letter
    22. Johnny Got His Gun
    23. The Diary of a Young Girl
    24. Deliverance
    25. The Good Earth
    26. A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich
    27- The Exorcist
    28. A Farewell to Arms
    29. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
    30. It's OK If You Don't Love Me

The committee owes a debt of gratitude to the college and university instructors who assisted in this project. It is a continuing source of puzzlement that college and university English departments seem to find problems of censorship in public schools of little importance. Of the approximately twelve dissertations on censorship that I am currently aware of, none has been written in an English department though several of the dissertations seem highly appropriate. Dorothy Thompson Weathersby's dissertation on school textbooks in Tennessee consisted of a comparison of the actual texts as published for use by seven major publishers for the Tennessee public schools with the correct original texts. She found many emendations, bowdlerizations and deletions. That was surely a literary study but it was not done in an English department. Few English departments offer courses in censorship. In view of the relative disinterest in the problems of censorship in public schools on the part of college and university English departments, the various writers who cooperated in this project are to be commended.

In her study of censorship problems, Nyla Ahrens pointed out in 1965 the characteristics of challenged books. Her comments remain quite accurate. The thirty most frequently challenged books are predominantly contemporary books: only The Scarlet Letter and Huckleberry Finn were published before the year 1900. It is also noteworthy that with a few exceptions—Lord of the Flies, 1984, Brave New World, One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, and The Diary of a Young Girl—the books were written by American authors. With a few exceptions—Our Bodies, Ourselves, The Diary of a Young Girl, I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings, Black Like Me, Go Ask Alice, the books are works of fiction.

A very obvious characteristic of the thirty most frequently challenged books is the high proportion of the titles that deal with members of minority groups in the United States. That list of titles includes The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, To Kill a Mockingbird, Manchild in the Promised Land, The Learning Tree, Black Like Me, One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest (an American Indian plays a significant role), The Diary of a Young Girl, A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. Moreover, two other titles, One Day in the Life. . . and The Good Earth, deal with non-Americans. The frequency of attack on books that deal with minority group people or foreigners must surely grow out of a hidden agenda that is essentially racist.

That a survey approach to the problems of censorship produces a probably dependable description of the current situation in the United States is suggested by comparing the eleven books removed by the Island Trees School Board with the comments made above. Those eleven books are: Go Ask Alice, A Reader for Writers, A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich, Soul on Ice, Best Short Stories by Negro Writers, Laughing Boy, The Fixer, The Naked Ape, Down These Main Streets, Slaughterhouse Five, Black Boy. Note that seven of these titles deal with minority group people.

So far as I know, no book used in the American public schools has been found obscene by any court, yet the term "obscene" is used with boring, laughable, maddening regularity for the titles discussed in this book. The 1982 survey carried out by Lee Burress showed that when the objections to the 304 books challenged in 1982 were organized into various classes, the books were charged with being obsence, using bad language, having sexual references, or containing obsence pictures or nudity nearly 300 times. There were some twenty-two other classes of objections as may be noted in the chart at the end of this introduction, but of the 502 objections listed in all, almost 300 essentially asserted that the books were obscene. Why a cross-section of the American public regards the books discussed in this study as obscene goes beyond the space available for this discussion. Continued effort must certainly be made to understand and cope with this problem.

An examination of these thirty titles also makes clear that censorship tends to attack the best and most relevant of works. As Milton pointed out in the Areopagitica, anyone wise enough to be a censor is too wise to be a censor. From the time of Anthony Comstock until today, censors have seemed unable to distinguish between literary works of great value and publications that are of little or no literary value. While a number of the titles covered in this book are probably somewhat ephemeral, most are literate, well-written books. Even the somewhat ephemeral ones—Black Like Me, for example—deal with important contemporary problems in a realistic manner. Many of them are masterpieces of world importance. It is clearly true, as this list demonstrates, that censors attack the best of books quite discriminately.

The 1982 survey referred to above made clear the serious effect of censorship pressures on the public shcools. Note the second chart beneath showing the disposition of the censorship cases for the forty-eight most frequently challenged titles reported on the 1982 survey. The respondents indicated that some form of censorship—removal from a recommended list, removal from classroom use, or removal from the library—occurred about 54 percent of the time. Two percent of the cases were pending; the remainder of the cases resulted in denying the request to censor the book or in providing an alternative assignment.

In preparing this book we did not restrict ourselves to the thirty most frequently challenged books, in addition to one general discussion of realistic literature by Marion Dane Bauer. We omitted one title, The Exorcist. The figure of thirty is rather artificial; other titles less frequently attacked well merit defense—the short story, "The Lottery," for example. In any case, the total list of titles that has been the object of attack in the last two decades probably exceeds 500 in number. Considerations of time and space together with the willingness of interested scholars forced us to limit our efforts to the material beneath.

It should not be assumed that because we have not discussed The Exorcist that we regard it as indefensible. The novel The Exorcist could be used to fulfill either of the two important functions of the school library. One of these functions is to supplement the curriculum. The other function is to provide a wide range of reading experience for students. The State Department of Public Instruction in Wisconsin in its guidelines for school libraries suggests that it is their obligation to provide materials that reflect "the cultural diversity and pluralistic nature of American society." If a school wished to include a unit in an English class which has as its purpose the critical examination of the occult and the fascination the occult holds for some people in this society, The Exorcist would be a useful book. If no class use of The Exorcist occurred, the book might still be in the school library because of the widespread interest in that book.

Several knowledgeable persons have written full accounts of the value of popular or ephemeral literature in developing reading skills. G. Robert Carlsen, Lou LaBrant (The Guinea Pig After Twenty Years), Albert Guerard (Preface to World Literature), Daniel Fader (Hooked on Books), and several other writers have described the role of popular books in developing lifetime readers. Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned about reading is that it brings pleasure. Books such as The Exorcist that meet the reading interest of large numbers of persons are clearly justifiable for public school libraries. One of the significant results of film and television is interest in the books from which the films were made or in books which grow out of films or TV presentations. Libraries are correct in stocking such books because of their appeal to the reader even though such books may have limited value, as is the case probably for The Exorcist.

Those of us involved in preparing this book hope that it will be useful to teachers, librarians, or citizens who find themselves in a conflict over the selection of materials for school or public libraries. Undoubtedly many other titles will be challenged in the years ahead. English teachers should be able to find in their library, or in a nearby university or college library, reference material that will help them defend their choices of learning material. In Wisconsin, the Children's Cooperative Book Center offers information about challenged books. It is likely that most library schools in the various states would also provide information to teachers whose book choices are challenged and whose high school library does not provide adequate reference material.

Members of the Committee Against Censorship of the National Council of Teachers of English would be glad to offer additional help. Members of the Committee may be reached through the office of NCTE at Urbana, Illinois. There are several other important sources of help including the Office for Intellectual Freedom of the American Library Association, 50 E. Huron Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611. SocialStudies teachers may apply to the National Council for the Social Studies, Legal Defense Fund, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. Other helpful groups include the various unions that teachers belong to, such as NEA and AFT. The National Education Association, Teachers' Rights, may be addressed at 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. The American Federation of Teachers may be addressed at 11 Dupont Circle, N.W., Washington D.C. 20036. College teachers may apply to the American Association of University Professors, One Dupont Circle, N.W., Washington D.C. 20036. The American Civil Liberties Union and its various state affiliates are also helpful. National headquarters of ACLU is 22 East 40th Street, New York, New York 10016. Many of these groups have state affiliates that may be quite accessible in time of need. States addresses may be available either from national headquarters of the various groups, or from the reference room of local libraries. Other helpful sources: Association of American Publishers, One Park Avenue, New York, New York 10016; People for the American Way, 1424 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Suite 601, Washington, D.C. 20036; Media Coalition, Inc., 425 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10022; National Coalition Against Censorship, 132 W. 43rd Street, New York, New York 10036.

OBJECTORS AND OBJECTIONS TO 304 BOOKS

1982 National Survey of 860 High School Librarians Concerning Books Challenged in the High School

	Parents	Librarian	Adm. Assist.	Teacher	English Chair	Administrator	Board of Education	Clergy	Students	Not Listed	Local Group	TOTAL
Obscene, Bad Language	142	9	1	7		2	3	3	7	9		183
Sexual References	65	6		9	1	7	1		4	2	4	99
Not Appropriate	18	5		1		3	1	1	2			31
Obscene Pictures, Nudity	3	3		5		1		1	1	1		15
Violence	10	1		1				1				13
Moral Values	7	1		1								9
Drugs	6								1			7
Religious Ideas	6			1				4	3			14
Racial Ideas	12								1			13
Trash	3			2								5
Distorted View of Life	3											3
Witches, Occult	7			3				1	1			12
Marriage and Family	2											2
Not Accurate	2	1		2			1					6

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	Parents	Librarian	Adm. Assist.	Teacher	English Chair	Adminis-trator	Board of Education	Clergy	Students	Not Listed	Local Group	TOTAL
Anti-War	1											1
Political Ideas	1						4					5
Humanism	1							2				3
Vulgar				1								1
Critical of Parents				1								1
Subject Matter	12	1		4				1	1			19
No Reason	25	1		3			1		1	23		54
Corrupts Young; Condones Bad Behavior	1							1				2
Evolution								2				2
Too Realistic View of Vietnam War				1								1
Author's Lifestyle	1											1
TOTAL	328	28	1	42	1	13	11	17	22	35	4	502

DISPOSITION OF CASES FOR MOST FREQUENTLY CHALLENGED BOOKS, 1982

Title	Request Denied	Some Form of Censorship	Pending
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn	3	2	2
Anthology of New York Poets		2	
Are You in the House Alone?		3	
Ball Four Plus Ball Five	1	1	
Bellvue is a State of Mind	1	1	
Black Like Me	1	1	
Brave New World	2	1	
Catch Twenty-Two	2		
The Catcher in the Rye	10	8	1
The Chocolate War	2		
Daddy Was a Numbers Runner		2	
The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test		4	
The Exorcist	2	2	
Forever	5	8	
Go Ask Alice	18	16	
The Grapes of Wrath	3	3	
Hard Feelings	2	1	
Headman	1	2	
A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich		7	
If Beale Street Could Talk		3	
I Hate to Talk About Your Mother	1	2	
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings	1	1	
I, Pig	1	1	
It's OK If You Don't Love Me	1	5	
Johnny Got His Gun	2	1	
Killing Mr. Griffin	2		
The Learning Tree	2	3	
Lord of the Flies	1	2	
The Lottery		2	

Title	Request Denied	Some Form of Censorship	Pending
Love Story		2	
Manchild in the Promised Land	1	2	
Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones	1	1	
My Darling, My Hamburger	4	1	
Native Son		2	
Nineteen Eighty-Four	1	1	
None of the Above	1	1	
All Books on the Occult	2	1	
Of Mice and Men	3	6	
Our Bodies, Ourselves	8	8	
Run, Shelley, Run	2	1	
A Separate Peace		1	
Sex: Telling it Straight	1	1	
Slaughterhouse-Five	2	4	1
Summer of Forty-Two		2	
Then Again, Maybe I Won't	1	2	
To Kill a Mockingbird	2	1	
A Way of Love, A Way of Life	1	1	
Winning	1	2	
TOTALS	95	114	4
PERCENTAGE	44.5%	53.8%	1.7%

TOTAL CASES 213

Lee Burress
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

A Rationale for Teaching Huckleberry Finn

> It is by the goodness of God that in our country we have those three unspeakably precious things: Freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to exercise either of them.
>
> — Mark Twain's Notebook[1]

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is more often caught than taught. It has become, with The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, such a staple of the American literary tradition that many, if not most adults "know" the story even though they often confuse it with Tom Sawyer. Recently I asked a class of college students, average age twenty-six, to write briefly on what they thought Huckleberry Finn was about. Of forty-five people in the class, two admitted to never having read the novel but they thought it was about "a boy who gets into many mischievous adventures, how he handles them and grows through them." Several seemed to have a global view: "Boy takes raft trip, encounters raffish characters, learns real meaning of friendship." "Huckleberry Finn was about a boy and how he related to people. The story was about his adventures as he grew up, and about his relationship with those around him." "Huck Finn was about a white boy who helped a Negro to gain freedom. He stood up for what he believed in rather than following the norms of his time." Others clearly remembered major themes and often specific incidents in the book which related to that theme: ". . .whenever Huck really tries to figure something out he compares how he sees things to how society sees things; he always thinks he is wrong (i.e., should he send the letter informing Miss Watson about Jim's whereabouts); but really society is wrong and Huck is right. This is especially true of racism." While still others saw many themes as represented by this student: "Huckleberry Finn is a million things: the story of a boy's moral growth; he does what he thinks is right instead of what society expects; a fictional account of the life and language of people in that historical period; an excellent geographical description of the Mississippi area; adventure, excitement; an often sarcastic, clever portrayal of people."

The range of responses from college-educated adults to this novel probably approximates their responses to many classics of literature. Time had fuzzed their memories and softened their responses to Huck Finn and had fused them with other reading experiences and contemporary issues. None of these students had read it since finishing high school. Some of them remembered reading it as junior high school students, some in a senior high school social studies or an American literature class. No trends were evident in when they had first been exposed to it. None of them could remember how it had been taught, although most of them believed that they had been required to read it.

Huckleberry Finn is a teachable novel that should be included in the school curriculum. It should and can be included in numerous places within the humanities and social science curricula. The reasons for including Huckleberry Finn in the curriculum are many and varied:

1. Mark Twain (Samuel Langhorne Clemens) is one of America's greatest authors.
2. Huckleberry Finn is believed by many to have truly started an American literature tradition.
3. The novel is an historical fictionalized description of the antebellum South with a particular emphasis on class and race.
4. It presents a classic portrayal of a youth's "rites of passage."
5. It is an exciting adventure story.
6. It provides a means to study literary elements used by the novel writer.

MARK TWAIN

Sometime between 1860 and 1900, the dominant emphasis in American literature began to change from romantic to realistic. Writers, to be sure, were sometimes romantic, as Twain was in Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc, and sometimes realistic, as he was in Old Times on the Mississippi and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Writers didn't identify themselves this way but in effect, as they dealt with their genres, they tended to insist on "veritism," the truthful presentation of material. The major American realistic writers during this period were Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and Henry James.

> And of these Mark Twain "had more qualitites that Americans like to think of as American than any other writer this country has produced. [His] stature. . .is recognized not merely in the way in which he reflected the multiform aspects of American life, but also in the way his nature more and more rebelled against that life—its commercialism, its easy optimism, its essential shallowness."[4]

Mark Twain is considered unique among American authors. No study of American literature would be complete without a study of his work.

HUCKLEBERRY FINN AS LITERARY MASTERPIECE

Although it would be an injustice to represent Mark Twain's contributions to literature with Huckleberry Finn only, it stands as one of his most significant contributions to American literature. Ernest Hemingway praised it: "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn." T.S. Eliot pronounced it a masterpiece, and Lionel Trilling recognized it as "one of the world's great books and one of the central documents of American culture."[3]

There were other accolades as well by Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, William Morris and George Bernard Shaw. Shaw wrote Twain that "the future historian of America will find your works as indispensable to him as a French historian finds the political tracts of Voltaire."[4] Critics, scholars, and, yes, the student, and the adult reader of literature have read and studied and written about Huckleberry Finn since it was published. It has remained popular, its many messages never diminished by those who would let the author explain himself.

HUCKLEBERRY FINN AS A HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

As pointed out by Trilling and Shaw, Huckleberry Finn is a central document of American culture and an indispensable document for understanding our cultural heritage. Twain was a journalist, river boat pilot, traveler, writer, lecturer, publisher, capitalist, and humanitarian. He brought all of this background to his novels, but he also brought his boyhood years growing up in Hannibal, Missouri, to which he and his family came in 1839 when he was four years old. It was all of these experiences that somehow crystallized in Huckleberry Finn. As he himself noted, "If you attempt to create a wholly imaginary incident, adventure or situation, you will go astray and the artificiality of the thing will be detectable, but if you found on a fact in your personal experience it is an acorn, a root, and every created adornment that grows up out of it, and spreads its foliage and blossom to the sun will seem reality, not inventions."[5]

It is possible to read Huckleberry Finn as an adventure. In fact, Twain himself referred to it as "another boy's" book. He himself, however, sometimes equivocated: "Part of my plan has been to try to pleasantly remind adults of what they once were themselves, and of how they felt and thought and talked, and what sheer enterprises they sometimes engaged in."[6] But what Twain of course did do, within the context of an adventure story, was to draw a picture of Middle America in the pre-Civil War period in such a way as to make clear the hypocritical, self-centered, simple-minded blindness of much of our society. He draws a stark picture of the American code of life and conduct that is often so close to us, the issues so painfully not resolved even today, that some people claim that the book is too sensitive to be read by credulous readers who may too easily read Twain's indictment of the right/wrong morality of the old South as approbation of that morality. This is particularly true of slavery. All of the characters in Huckleberry Finn accept the slave code. The racist bias in the novel is of course one aspect of Twain's pervasive irony on racism in our society. The moral crisis in Huck's deciding to break the code is perhaps one of the best scenes in the novel: "students who cannot take a serious stand on a moral question and at the same time realize that this stand can be supported in more ways than one are not intellectually ready for this novel."[7]

One study completed in 1983 at the State College, Pennsylvania, examined the effects of reading Huckleberry Finn on the racial attitudes of ninth-grade students. The data from that study indicated "that students who read the novel as part of an instructional unit demonstrated both a deeper sensitivity to the moral and psychological issues central to the novel (a number of which deal with issues of race) and a more positive attitude on matters calling for racial understanding and acceptance."[8] The committee that produced the report did, however, recommend that the book be moved from ninth grade to eleventh or twelfth grade since many ninth graders interpreted it as an adventure story and missed the elements of satire critical to understanding the novel. They suspected that much of the satire when directed at Black characters was often misperceived as caricature. The committee also noted that there did not appear to be any program providing instruction in minority group concepts in the school system and that Huckleberry Finn was the only novel in the curriculum to present "a segment of the Black experience."

The concern over racism, over religion, and politics in Huckleberry Finn only reinforces its importance to the understanding of our own culture and our own literary background. If Mark Twain had chosen to set this story in King Arthur's England or Homer's Greece, undoubtedly the culture could be studied with detachment. Students would not be committed to their own religious, cultural, or political views and hence would be able to separate Twain's sharp focus on people, institutions, and relationships from the historical structure that he chose to use in the novel. It is precisely because Twain shows us our own cultural background, however, that the novel can do so much to inform us about our own cultural biases. To read Huckleberry Finn is to see how we have thought and acted in our own time, own towns and counties. As Huck and Jim witness society, its values, its traditions, and indeed as they participate (albeit on the fringes of others' lives throughout their sojourn), so we too come to witness and perhaps to question our observations. Or, even if we do not question, we at least note the similarities and differences between then and now, note the growing and even the withering of our national spirit. Examples abound in the novel. Many of them, of course, need explication if the student is to fully appreciate them. Huck's time with the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons in Chapters 17 and 18 is a case in point. In these chapters, Twain devastatingly describes the pointless bloody vendetta between these families, ties it to eternal struggles on the frontier between farmers (grangers) and herders (shepherdsons) and at the same time attacks the rank, caste, and pedigree system that dominated the South prior to the Civil War. In Chapter 22 Twain speaks out through Sherburn about mobs and individual courage. Mobs and the lack of independence is important in Huckleberry Finn and echoes in fiction Mark Twain's own position in his essay "The United States of Lyncherdom": ". . . the increase [in lynching] comes of the inborn human instinct to imitate—that and man's commonest weakness, his aversion to being unpleasantly conspicuous, pointed at, shunned, as being on the unpopular side."[9]

He abhors the mob and pokes fun at it in other places in the novel as the gullible townspeople along the Mississippi are duped by the "King" and the "Duke." The conflict between individual courage and doing what everyone else does has already been noted in Huck's wrestling with his own conscience concerning Jim, but it is evident elsewhere as well. Shortly after rescuing the King and Duke from their pursuers in Chapter 19, Huck recognizes "that these liars warn't no kings nor dukes, at all, but just low-down humbugs and frauds. But I never said nothing, never let on; kept it to myself: it's the best way; then you don't have no quarrels, and don't get into no trouble." Huck and Jim harbor these humbugs and frauds until finally Huck in desperation risks personal misadventure to rescue the Wilks sisters' inheritance by hiding the money in their deceased father's coffin. His personal courage in action had, at that point, not been accompanied by personal courage in voice, until of course he is faced with Mary Jane Wilks' desolation at the separation by sale of Black children from their mother. Huck finally begins to "study it out." Should he tell the truth? What will he risk? He decides for truth.

HUCKLEBERRY FINN AS A YOUTH NOVEL

Huckleberry Finn is also a classic adolescent "rite of passage" novel. The themes of initiation, death, and rebirth recur throughout. "You don't know me, without you have read a book by the name of 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,' but that ain't no matter." And it isn't any matter. For the character of Huck is fully developed in his own story. It is the story of a boy perhaps fourteen years old, son of the town drunkard, one of the first drop-outs in our history, an identified delinquent who must escape from "home" and his father. He eventually decides to do this by disappearing in such a way as to be presumed dead, a trick which he uses several times during the novel. It is from this point in Chapter 7 that Huck embarks on his journey, his growing up time. His journey with Jim down the Mississippi is a time when he begins to develop an understanding of another human being in a non-stereotypic way. No other human being contributes so much to his growth as does Jim. Although Huck never completely transcends the stereotypic notions of his society, he does change attitudes toward other people as his experiences with Jim force him to confront his views about Black people. He rejects the notion of people as property, recognizes the feelings of others, and learns to respond to the individual rather than the role.

From each adventure that he and Jim have, Huck grows and learns about humanity. He begins to think for himself, going beyond what he has been told and what he has observed in his own home town. He begins to search for meaning, the self that can stand alone under pressure, and for significant others. But the process is slow. It is a long time from his rejection of "Pap" to his acceptance of Jim as his father, guide, protector, and teacher. Huck must decide between society's rules and his friend. He must must decide what rules to follow. "...somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him." In this situation, as well as others, (e.g., the King and the Duke against the Wilks), Huck seems to be showing a degree of moral development far superior than one would expect for an adolescent. He deals with moral problems not from the competing rights position that one would expect in a simplistic law and order society but from a contextual inductive relativistic position that Carol Gilligan in her study of psychological theory and women's development would probably judge as a feminist position since Huck seems to worry about helping others when he can, never mind the deviousness in the way he chooses to help them.[10]

It is not unexpected that a boy's book of the nineteenth century would not deal with sexual awakening, but Twain certainly deals with all other aspects of adolescent development: emotions, family relationships, social adjustment (or perhaps the lack thereof in this case), religion (if only in the strong symbolism of the river and the almost complete failure of Christian religion to respond to the violence and duplicity of the period), initiation and identity. Huck swings wildly from childish follies to social sensitivity and back again. Huck's misbehaviors and eccentricities only highlight the terrible turbulence of adolescence. Current adolescents can recognize and deal with Huck's crises even if they find difficulty identifying with them in the setting of the violent American antebellum frontier which was the Mississippi.

The book, again, is an exciting adventure story with a typical plot of the young boy who breaks with the past and sets off on a journey to find himself—a journey filled with adventures that test him physically, psychologically, and intellectually. The journey is filled with many narrow escapes and sometimes satisfactory resolutions. Huck is a bewildered, not always willing, witness to the baser side of humanity and the grandeur of the river and the countryside. One can only speculate about how the boy will assimilate these experiences, for he still has much growing to do as he consideres "light[ing] out for the Territory."

LITERARY ELEMENTS IN HUCKLEBERRY FINN

We can delight in the humorous and varied escapades that Huck has, yet develop a deeper vision of the world as Twain saw it and described it. But if our students are to understand the world as Twain viewed it, they need to begin to understand the literary elements that Twain used to describe this world. Many of Twain's themes become evident in the novel and in the discussion of it. His themes deal with the issues of freedom, human dignities, and personal responsibility, trickery and deceit, respect and compassion, complacency about evil, bigotry, avarice, optimism, shallowness—the essential problems of human beings learning to respect and care for others.

The unique style of Twain presents an excellent opportunity to examine the structure of the novel, the use of satire, realistic characterization, point of view, sensory description of people and places, literary allusion, the use of language, humor and pathos, tragedy, and romance. Some of these have already been described above and space here is too limited to examine in detail how these might be treated. Some are more critical than others. Understanding satire is critical to the comprehension of Huckleberry, but satire probably should not be introduced using Huckleberry Finn. Satire as a concept can better be introduced through the study of modern satirists such as political cartoonists or columnists (e.g., Art Buchwald) where students have access to other descriptions of the human vices and follies that the satirists ridicule or scorn. This is also true of dialect. Twain's use of dialect is important to the authenticity of his characters, but his dialect should not be the first written dialect to which students are exposed (although it certainly was a first to Twain's readers when the novel was officially published). Students unused to dialects other than their own are much too likely to associate the difference with lack of intelligence and to use it to belittle others out of ignorance of the ways that language works.

In an adolescent novel called The Day They Came to Arrest the Book, Nat Hentoff has one of his black student characters, Steve Turney, express it this way: "In this book, those words—particularly 'nigger'—are not intended by the author, Mr. Clemens. . .to insult or humiliate me or any other black person. They are intended to rebuke and bring scorn to those ignorant, so-called grown-up white people in the book who use those words. . . .Huckleberry Finn uses that word because the way he grew up and where he grew up it was the natural thing to do. . .He doesn't see black people as niggers, even though he uses the word. He sees Jim as a man, a man who should be free, and he tries hard to help him keep free."[11] Hentoff's novel would make an interesting preface to the study of Huckleberry Finn in the high school curriculum.

Huckleberry Finn has much to teach us about ourselves as developing human beings, our culture and our history. As his creator put it in a presentation copy of the novel:

> This is Huck Finn, a child of mine of shady reputation. Be good to him for his parent's sake.[12]

Steve Turney in Hentoff's novel understood this well.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Maxwell Geismer, ed., Mark Twain and the Three R's: Race, Religion, Revolution and Related Matters (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973), p. 243.

[2] Louis Wann, ed., The Rise of Realism: 1860-1900 (New York: Macmillan Company, 1961), p. 14.

[3] Michael Patrick Hearn, The Annotated Huckleberry Finn (New York: Clarkson H. Potter, Inc., 1981), pp. 37-38.

[4] Hearn, pp. 36-37.

[5] Hearn, p. 39.

[6] Evelyn Geller, "Tom Sawyer, Tom Bailey, and the Bad Boy Genre." Wilson Library Bulletin (November, 1976), p. 245.

[7] Bruce Miller, Teaching the Art of Literature (Urbana: The National Council of Teachers of English, 1980), p. 103.

[8] The Effects of Reading Huckleberry Finn. A cooperative study of the State College Area School District and the Forum on Black Affairs of the Pennsylvania State University (State College, Pennsylvania, Fall, 1983), p. 21.

[9] Geismer, p. 37.

[10] Carol Gilligan, In A Different Voice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

[11] Nat Hentoff, The Day They Came to Arrest the Book (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1982), pp. 162-163.

[12] Hearn, p. 1.

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Historical Perspective of the Huck Finn Challenge *

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn was evidently a challenge for Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain). He began the book as a sequel to The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1873, put the book aside for several years, and completed the more serious novel Huckleberry Finn in 1883. A different challenge awaited Twain, however. His problems with the censors and the book challengers began shortly after publication of the book. Brandon Matthew of the London Saturday Review praised Huckleberry Finn. T. S. Perry of the Century Magazine was favorable. Despite the favorable critique, the Century which had serialized several sections prior to publication excluded the shooting of Boggs and the attempted lynching of Col. Sherburn (DeVoto, 1932).

These reviews, however, were in the minority. Most of the early critics either attacked the book or ignored it. The Boston Advertiser (1885) dismissed the book as a failure and criticized Twain for his "spirit of irreverence." The Springfield Republic (1885) compared Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer to the dime novels of the "blood-and-thunder reading population" stating that the "moral tone is low and their perusal cannot be anything less than harmful" (Critic, 1885, p. 155). Life, which was a comic magazine in 1885, condemned Huckleberry Finn as unsuitable for children and "contained one bloodcurdling scene after another." Louisa May Alcott said, "If Mr. Clemens cannot think of something better to tell our pure-minded lads and lasses, he had better stop writing for them" (Critic, 1885, p. 155). The Concord Library in Massachusetts, probably the first library to ban the book, called it "trashy, vicious, and unfit to be placed next to books by Emerson and Thoreau." The Boston Transcript (1885) reported that the library charged that Huck Finn was more "suited to the slums than to intelligent, respectable people." Both Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn were excluded from the Brooklyn Public Libary in 1905 as "bad examples for ingenuous youth" and Huck was described as a "deceitful boy" (Dickinson, 1935, p. 183).

During the hundred years after its publication, critics have exclaimed its worthiness as literature even though there is question over the structure of the last chapters. Lionel Trilling (1948), in his "Introduction" to the book, asks "Wherein does (Huck Finn's) greatness be?" and answers, "Primarily in its power of telling the truth." Kenneth Lynn, in the Yale Review (1958), speaks highly of the novel and the "intense relationship" of Huck and Jim. He refers to the bewilderment of Jim in Chapter 23 as he confides in Huck of striking his child for disobeying him. "De Lord God Almighty forgive po' ole Jim, koze he never gwyne to forgive hisself as long's he live!" Lynn considers this moment as possibly the most poignant in the novel.

T. S. Elliot in his "Introduction" to Huckleberry Finn (1950) states "Huck would be incomplete without Jim, who is almost as notable a creation as Huck himself. Huck is the passive observer of men and events. Jim the submissive sufferer from them; and they are equal in dignity."

It is the portrayal of Jim, however, that precipitates the challenge to Huckleberry Finn in the eighties. The problems of 1984 are different than they were in 1884. There are changes in societal norms. There is little or no controversy over the pranks in the book or Huck's lack of knowledge of standard English. The references to feuds, near lynchings, and ornery preachings can be explained away as satire and drawing on local color. People often leisurely duplicate the setting out on a raft for the sheer sportsmanship or adventure of it. The controversy continues in different ways for different reasons. Blacks are no longer the newly freed slaves, unsure of a place in society, struggling for sheer existence and substance for life. But the shackles, though invisible, and the cruelties of slavery, though historical, are still very real in their minds. Gains in economical, political, educational and social status of blacks have caused them to take exception to Huck Finn based primarily on the portrayal of Jim. A cursory reading of the book may show Jim, a slave, as illiterate, superstitious, and gullible. His dialect is difficult to read and understand. In addition, the work "nigger" is used whenever there is a reference to black people in general and to Jim in particular. The constant use of the derogatory term and Jim's seemingly inferior traits are the focus of objection to Huckleberry Finn today.

On June 25, 1982, in a 5-4 decision, the Supreme Court ruled that "local school boards may not remove books from the school library shelves simply because they dislike the ideas contained in those books and seek their removal to prescribe what shall be be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion or other matters of opinion." Nonetheless, there have been nearly one thousand attempts to have over one hundred different books removed from schools and public libraries in thirty-four states. The most censored books are books by or about minorities. According to the Office for Intellectual Freedom of the American Library Association, Huckleberry Finn is at the top of the list of books found to be offensive by American blacks. Huckleberry Finn has come under challenge in classrooms of Davenport, Iowa; Warrington, Pennsylvania; Houston, Texas; Montgomery County, Maryland; State College, Pennsylvania; and Fairfax County, Virginia.

In Fairfax County, Virginia, a racially balanced group called the Human Relations Committee of Mark Twain Intermediate School challenged the book because it is "poison," anti-American, works against the melting pot theory, and is in conflict with the Fourteenth Amendment and the Preamble. John Wallace, a black assistant principal in Fairfax County has decided to rewrite the book, deleting the use of "nigger" and other "negative references" (Nelson, 1982).

In 1981, in Warrington, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Huckleberry Finn was removed from the Tamanend Junior High

School curriculum and placed in the tenth-grade curriculum. Parents had wanted it banned from required reading thoughout the district. The principal of Tamanend, in an interview with John Hilferty of the Philadelphia Inquirer, stated that if one boy was embarrassed, there are others who are embarrassed also, but would remain quiet. "Junior high school kids can be terribly cruel to each other." Parents argued that students in eighth grade were not mature enough to understand Twain's "subtle attack on slavery" and responded to the word "nigger" by abusing black students (Daily News, 1981). In State College, Pennsylvania, parents required "that this book [Huckleberry Finn] be immediately discontinued as a regular part of the English curriculum." A parent objected to the profuse use of the term "nigger" in the book and said that her son (the only black student in the classroom) suffered "social and emotional discomfort throughout the instructional unit" (Effects of Reading Huckleberry Finn, p. 1).

Mark Twain, in his autobiography, confessed, "In my schoolboy days, I had no aversion to slavery. I was not aware that there was anything wrong with it. No one arraigned it in my hearing; the local papers said nothing against it; the local pulpit taught us that God approved it...if the slaves themselves had an aversion to slavery, they were wise and said nothing" (Clemens, p. 6). Nonetheless, Huckleberry Finn makes a statement against slavery. Michael Hearn (1982) claims that "no work of American literature exposes the corruption of the 'peculiar institution' more eloquently than does Mark Twain's novel." He explains that Huck uses the word "nigger" because he is a "child of his time" (p. 117). David Bradley, author of the Chaneysville Incident says that he rereads Huckleberry Finn every year and "I don't see how anybody can read the book and find it racist" (Nelson, 1982). Bradley is black.

The feud continues and Huckleberry Finn remains the challenged. Almost one hundred years after its publication, there are still attempts to remove the book from library shelves and classrooms. Perhaps 1885 is not so long ago after all.

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*This manuscript is an excerpt from a dissertation which is in work.

The Case for Anne Frank
The Diary of a Young Girl[1]

In 1933 Otto Frank and his family left their home in Germany to avoid Nazi persecution. They resettled in Amsterdam. By 1942, however, they were endangered again, this time by the Nazi forces occupying Holland. To avoid deportation, the Franks faked an escape, then hid in a warehouse attic, together with four Dutch Jews, to wait out the war. They were discovered by the Grüne Polizei in 1944, two months before the allied liberation of Holland and sent to concentration camps where all died except Mr. Frank.

Anne Frank was thirteen years old when her family went into hiding, fifteen when they were captured. She kept a diary during those two years with entries addressed to an imaginary friend so that, as Anne put it, she might have somebody with whom to talk about things "outside the common." Dutch friends of the Franks found the diary after the police left; it was published in 1947. Its entries record the day-to-day efforts of the Franks and their compatriots to carry on something like an ordinary, decent life in circumstances of prolonged enclosure and privation. The entries also describe Anne's growth. At thirteen she is a "quicksilver-active girl...., pretty, popular, voluble, brilliant."[2] At fifteen she is an ardent, reflective young woman—self-critical and possessed of mature convictions.

Why might schools encourage reading of Anne Frank? The general reason is simply that Anne Frank is a primary source, a personal account that discloses the effect of Nazi policy as it came to bear in a particular case. Primary sources—memoirs, eye-witness accounts, autobiographies—help to fill out and particularize our historical understanding in a way that textbook summaries cannot match. Had Priam's grandchildren kept notes on the siege of Troy, generations of readers would have been grateful. Liang Heng's account of growing up as a Red Guard during the Chinese Cultural Revolution stands as a recent example.[3] "The humanities are best learned by studying texts, not by reading textbooks."[4]

In addition, although it is an autobiography, Anne Frank exemplifies certain characteristics of modern fiction and has, accordingly, a rightful place in school literature programs. I offer three suggestions in this regard.

1. The Inward Turn of Narrative

In the mythologies and epics of classical Western literature, heroes personify tribal struggles and group anxieties. Their exploits dramatize cultural values. The development of Western literature is in part a movement away from this tradition of character types and external action.[5] Wordsworth voices the shift of emphasis in The Prelude:

> Not of outward things
> Done visibly for other minds, words, signs,
> Symbols or actions; but of my own heart
> Have I been speaking, and my youthful mind.
>
> . . .
>
> Points have we all of us within our souls,
> Where all stand single.
>
> (1805 text, III, 174-77, 186-87)

The shift is reflected subsequently in a modernist history of lyricism, eccentricity, irony, parody, and formal innovation. In her relentless introspection, her capacity to watch herself as if she were an outsider, and her drive toward personal autonomy, Anne Frank stands in the modernist tradition. "I know quite well what I want," she writes (17 March, 1944); "I have a goal, an opinion, I have a religion and love. Let me be myself. . . . I know that I'm a woman. . .with inward strength and plenty of courage" (11 April, 1944).

2. The Fortinbras Effect

Hamlet thinks and re-thinks what he should do, buying time with clever talk and an antic disposition. All the while Fortinbras circles in the background, eager to take over should Claudius and Hamlet ignore the defense of Elsinore in their preoccupation with themselves. The Fortinbras effect—the hard world of affairs, pressing in—figures prominently in modern literature, sometimes symbolically, as in Kafka's The Trial, often more literally, as in V.S. Naipul's A Bend in the River. Anne Frank looks inward, but the outside world presses hard on her as she strives to settle her relationship with her mother, her father, and Peter Van Daan, and, above all, as she tries to understand the war and the extermination program in which she and the others are caught up. Her story is not exclusively introspective; it tells also of the need to tidy up the bathroom, so that people may live comfortably in a crowded place, and of gathering around the radio at night to follow the war news, especially as D-Day and the prospect of liberation draws near. The assimilation of external events, as well as the development of new thought patterns, shapes Anne's growth.

3. Variations in the Story of Growth

In literature how are young people shown growing up? Juliet is transformed quickly by youthful passion. Others typically undergo a separation from home and family, followed by a journey or series of adventures in which they develop competence, judgment, and a sense of identity. Julie in Julie of the Wolves is a recent example. But Anne Frank, confined in an attic, cannot traverse a tundra or solve a crime; she cannot strike out on her own, except intellectually. She cannot grow apart from her parents, but must instead judge continually whether and in what respects to follow their example in political and moral reasoning and in personal matters. She is distinctive in that she pursues her own maturation not by adventure but by a deliberate program of self-improvement: reading, imagining out possible causes of action and self-correction. "I must become good through my own efforts. . . . Then later on I shall be stronger" (7 November, 1942). That is one variation on the story of growth. The other has to do with expectation typically raised by the story of growth: the journey will end, the newly strengthened hero will emerge to begin a new phase of life. In Anne Frank the expectation goes unfulfilled.

Anne Frank will not appeal automatically to young readers. Some who don't know its background will not take to it. Others will be unaccustomed to the inward focus and impatient with the slow, subtle development of Anne's character. These difficulties, however, are the difficulties ordinarily associated with new learning. We have schools only because we want young people to learn new things.

Another set of difficulties has to do with adults. Anne Frank is a book that some parents, and other adults who monitor schools, have found objectionable. Under the circumstances now surrounding schooling, more objections may be expected. On what grounds?

The first is political or ideological. There are Americans who contend that the holocause never occurred, or that events commonly associated with it have been distorted in post-war propaganda campaigns. From that angle of vision, Anne Frank might be seen as a piece of special pleading, an appeal ad misericordiam on behalf of one group, aimed at making other groups look bad. People who see it that way might argue that it presents false historical information, or that it "teaches hate" by putting Germans or Christians in a bad light, and so on.

If an objection of this sort does arise, school people should try to learn early on whether something more than the use of Anne Frank is at stake. The objection might reflect the program of a group or an individual known to be preoccupied in an unfriendly way with Jews. In such a case particulars of the text, or details about school uses of it, may prove less important than the general problem of preventing an outside group from projecting its program onto the curriculum.

Insofar as the effort at prevention did require textual review, school people would need to address the historical accuracy issue and the "teaching of hate" issue. The key point in the former case is that an autobiographical text by itself can neither prove nor disprove any disputed historical fact. But this is no pedagogical handicap. It isn't likely that English or history teachers would use Anne Frank to engage adolescents in original scholarship aimed at settling disputed facts. More likely, they would presuppose certain minimal facts (e.g., that World War II did occur, that Nazis did round up Jews and kill them), then use particular accounts of them to explore their human significance. Isn't that presupposing exactly the problem? Not really. We don't tell children stories about Queen Isabella and Columbus to prove that the earth is round, and if it isn't round our problem is a more serious one than having told the wrong stories. Similarly, schools don't make Anne Frank available—or Elie Wiesel's Night, or Remarque's All Quiet–to prove that certain wars occurred, accompanied by certain atrocities. And if the wars and atrocities have not occurred, the correction needed is far greater than a change in supplementary readings.

As for the "teaching of hate" line of objection, it should be easy to show briefly that nothing of the sort is true. One might approach Anne Frank expecting to find bitterness; the remarkable fact is that it contains almost none. In one of her early entries, after reporting accounts of Gestapo deportations and murders, Anne does conclude gloomily that "Germans and Jews are the greatest enemies in the world" (9 October 1942). But it is clear that she is reacting to the Gestapo and to Naziism. Part of the pain she feels is for her own loss of German identity: "Hitler took away our nationality" (Ibid.). In subsequent entries she continues to report news of the war, and she does so as an Allied partisan. But she also continues to show affinity for her family's German language and culture. When her father gives her a birthday verse he has composed in German, for example, she is deeply touched (13 June 1943). The Franks are dispossessed German Jews, not German haters.

A second source of potential trouble has to do with Anne's attitude toward adults. By 1984 standards Anne will seem studious, well-mannered, and cooperative, but she is nonetheless at odds from time to time with the Van Daans, Mr. Dussel, and her mother. Their quarrels with each other irritate her, and she finds them to be overbearing and ill-mannered. At times she finds them foolish. "Oh, those stupid grownups," she writes, after transcribing a political discussion between Mr. and Mrs. Van Daan (16 May 1944). Her rows with her mother are especially serious. She finds her mother to be cold and unloving. She expresses this feeling matter-of-factly on one occasion (2 April 1943), exacerbating what was already a bad relationship. She idolizes her father but angers him, too–e.g., by writing him a brassy letter telling him, in effect, to stop monitoring her affairs (5 May 1944).

This side of Anne's story might well be enough to stir up objections among people who test books against a simple respect-for-adults criterion. The professional response should include a textual review to prevent oversimplification. Anne's relation to adults is not uniformly adverse. It is in part a reflection of her mercurial temperament. She quarrels one day, reflects on the incident, then works deliberately to show greater understanding and self-control (e.g., 2 January 1944). Moreover, circumstances have an obvious bearing on the problem. Confined, unable to work or exercise, in constant dread of betrayal and capture, all occupants of the attic find that the ordinary nuisances of daily life become unusually irksome. "Relations between us here are getting worse all the time. At mealtimes, no one dares to open their mouths . . . because whatever is said . . . you annoy someone" (16 September 1943).

It shouldn't be necessary, however, to gloss over Anne's difficulties, portraying them merely as juvenile lapses. To do that would be to accept the premise that schools must shield young readers from books that depict genuine conflict across generations. That premise applied generally would put King Lear, Wuthering Heights, and several Nancy Drew stories into official disuse. Applied in the case of Anne Frank, it would deflect attention from an important quality in the book. Anne does stand apart from the adults in her life, and she does look on critically at the world they have wrought. In this critical stance she embodies the prospect that a new generation will emerge at the end of the war to lead in efforts at rebuilding. To read Anne Frank well is to follow her growth in that direction, anticipating the ways in which her prickly, troubled attitude will be transmuted eventually in action.

The third source of potential trouble has to do with Anne's sexual maturation. The reader sees her early on as a precocious child, pleased enough with herself to enjoy light flirtation. When she and family are joined in the attic by the Van Daans, she is not impressed at first by 15-year-old Peter. But she and Peter do develop a friendship, and eventually it takes a serious turn: "From early in the morning till late at night, I really do hardly anything but think of Peter" (27 February 1944). In large part it is a friendship based on the discovery by Anne and Peter that they can speak candidly to each other, discussing even "the most intimate things" without embarrassment (18 April 1944). But they also feel ardor, eagerly awaiting evenings when "the suppressed longings of the whole day, the happiness and... blissful memories of all the previous occasions come to the surface..." (28 April 1944). These evening meetings are one source of tension between Anne and her parents. In the end Anne begins to regard the relationship analytically, finding Peter to be unduly dependent on her and regretting that she has not been able to manage a friendship without intimacy (15 July 1944).

The intimacy Anne refers to seems to have been limited physically to kisses and embraces. No lurid erotica are described. But people looking for a way to dislike this book might make much of what is suggested by the obvious depth of feeling Anne reveals. She does, indeed, emerge as a young woman with keenly felt sensuous impulses as well as intellectual ones. That mature sensuality, taken together with Anne's growth away from parental control, might provoke certain readers more strongly than does the usual run of smirky sex in drugstore paperbacks and in the popular media.

The professional response, again, might be two-fold—first to establish clearly the textual facts in question, second to affirm the educational value of stories depicting maturation. "There really are young people," Anne reflects, after a talk with Peter, "who can discuss these things naturally without making fun of them" (24 January 1944). "These things happen in this case to be sexual; Peter has shown her that she has been mistaken about the gender of a pet cat. But Anne is pleased generally by having pushed back a bit the boundaries of what is discussable, by having found that ordinary talking and thinking may be applied in areas previously covered over by ignorance and conventions of silence.

Most educators profess a curricular goal according to which the pushing back of such boundaries, the discovery of new applications for ordinary reasoning, is a good thing. If it is a good thing, then competent use of materials that depict such discoveries is also a good thing. This relation between goals and materials is what we finally come down to in fights over books like Anne Frank. Those who want Anne Frank out want certain goals out. By their responses, educators will show in turn whether they want what they say they do.

[1] Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl. Tr. B. M. Mooyaart. Doubleday, 1953.

[2] John Berryman, "The Development of Anne Frank," in the Freedom of the Poet (Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1976), p. 94.

[3] Liang Heng and Judith Shapiro, Son of the Revolution (Knopt, 1983).

[4] Chester E. Finn, Jr. and Diane Ravitch, "Conclusions and Recommendations," in Against Mediocrity: The Humanities in America's High Schools, ed. Chester E. Finn, Jr., Diane Ravitch, and Robert T. Fancher (Holmes & Meier, 1984), p. 257.

[5] Erich Kahler, The Inward Turn of Narrative, tr. Richard & Clara Winston (Princeton, 1973).

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Black Like Me: In Defense of A Racial Reality

John Howard Griffin's Black Like Me[1] took America by storm in 1960. For it was the first, and to date only, book in which a white American "literally" entered the skin of a Negro[2] and articulated to the world the Negro's struggle for freedom, equality, and dignity. Griffin's personal odyssey in several states of the old Confederacy was unique in that it enabled a white person to view the race problem from the "inside looking out" instead of from the "outside looking in." He was able to capture the raw, genuine feelings of both Negroes and whites as they were buffeted by the peculiar system of "Jim Crow" segregation. His experience served to strip an unjust situation of all of its pretensions and rationales.

However, during the two previous decades, black and white writers had objectively explicated the race problem via fiction and sociological and anthropological inquiries. Beginning in 1940, Richard Wright pricked the national conscience with his riveting tale of a Negro protagonist's (Bigger Thomas) birth, degradation and execution in the classic novel, Native Son.[3] This was followed in 1941 by Deep South, a socio-anthropological study that showed how the Negro adapted to the mandates of the southern caste system while still striving to maintain a sense of self-worth and a modicum of hope for the future. In 1941, Gunnar Myrdal, the Swedish economist, produced the magnum opus, An American Dilemma,[4] which was touted as the most comprehensive study of the totality of the Negro's problem in American Democracy. Finally, Ralph Ellison's award winning Invisible Man (1952)[5] fictionalized the Negro's virtual invisibility in his adopted land—his inability to get white America to recognize or to accept his essential humanity.

This was the backdrop against which Black Like Me was conceived. For by 1959 both black and white writers had established the parameters of the race problem in all of its statistical and human complexity. Griffin, at first intent on conducting a research study, decided instead to transform his pigmentation from white to brown so that he might personally endure the pain and suffering of his Negro brothers. When first released, Black Like Me was hailed by the critics and damned by many segments of the public. In 1960 many white Americans were still trying to hold on to the status quo. The 1954 Brown decision, which ushered in school desegregation, was still limited in its impact. Martin Luther King, Jr. was only then beginning to establish a national and international reputation, and the freedom rides had not entered the South. Black was not yet beautiful, and the cauldrons of northern and southern ghettos had not yet boiled over. In short, there were few manifestations of national concern about racial discrimination. Black Like Me, in its poignant portrayal of the absurdity and injustice inherent in southern black/white relations, forced America to look at the problem anew. No longer could it be said that liberal whites and angry blacks had overstated the case or that "egghead" scholars did not really understand the uniqueness of southern race relations. The traditional defenses had been laid bare since a southerner had captured the incongruity of racial discrimination.

White readers who considered themselves decent, godfearing citizens were embarrassed by the stark, authentic revelations. Those who had psychologically constructed a harmonious world of blacks and whites living happily in their castlelike places were faced with a discomforting state of dissonance. Therefore, it is obvious why someone who endorses censorship would object to Black Like Me.

The most frequent objections to Griffin's work have been that it did not accurately reflect the reality of the southern social situation and that its publication only served to create and to inflame racial antagonisms and was, perhaps, inspired by radicals, communists or agitators.

Upon entering the Negro world as a Negro, Griffin was struck by the overwhelming immediacy of second-class citizenship. As a Negro, he found that his primary concern was the white man and how to get along with him. Somehow, he had to find a way to hold his own as a man and to raise himself in the esteem of whites without for one moment letting them think that they had any God-given rights that he did not also possess. The reality of the Negro's plight was that he was not really treated "as a second-class citizen, but as a tenth-class one." (p. 47) Nowhere was this more evident than in the pattern of economic injustice. Even when Negroes prepared themselves, they could not get jobs commensurate with their education or capabilities. College graduation still left them with a long hard pull as most had to take postal, teaching or preaching jobs. Many came to accept the fact that they were not going to ever quite manage. Consequently, a lot of them just gave up. They learned to take what they could, often in pleasure or wild gestures, because they had absolutely nothing to lose.

At the same time whites used these behavior patterns as a raison d' etre for denying Negroes first-class citizenship. Negroes were consigned to the lowest stratum of society and then blamed for being at that point in the social order. This oppressive circular reality worked to depress individual initiative and fostered intraracial conflicts as Negroes, disillusioned by their lack of progress, often turned on each other. The Negro, as a consequence, encountered a double problem. "First, the discrimination against him. Second, and almost more grievous, his discrimination against himself; his contempt for blackness that he associat[ed] with his suffering; his willingness to sabotage his fellow Negroes because they [were] part of the blackness he . . . found so painful." (p. 44)

To be a Negro, Griffin discovered, required the continual sufferance of a series of small, incremental indignities, whose cumulative weight seared one's very soul. One had to adjust to maintaining a genial countenance so as not to offend any white who might equate sullenness with a breach of the deferential status assigned to the Negro. If hungry, one had to be certain that he was always in close proximity to a Negro establishment or risk being rebuffed at any other. In public one had to stay constantly on the move, unless permitted to remain idle by a white, to avoid being monitored or harassed by the police. And if one mastered all of these balancing acts on his daily tightrope of life, he had to always reconcile himself to the fact that any white reserved the right to simply "cut the rope" for no good reason.

Thus, the Negro's only respite from utter hopelessness was his belief—the belief of his forefathers—that these insults and degradations were not directed at him personally, but directed against Negroes in general. "His mother or aunt . . . long ago . . . prepared him, explaining that he as an individual [could] live in dignity, even though he as a Negro [could not]." (p. 48) Nevertheless, these assaults on the Negro's personhood had a wrenching impact for they gave him a view of the white man that the white man never understood. Although the Negro was part of the black mass, the white was always the individual and had sincerely felt that he had been fair and kind to his darker brother. Moreover, such men were surprised and "offended to find Negroes suspicious of them, never realizing that the Negro [could not] understand how . . . whites as a group [could] . . . contrive to arrange life so that it destroy[ed] the Negro's sense of personal value . . . deaden[ed] the fiber of his being." (p. 48)

And when Negroes or whites dared to question the injustice of it all, they were immediately branded as traitors, communists or agitators. Any enlightened move toward racial justice was viewed as "Zionist-inspired, Satan inspired, Illuminati-inspired . . . part of some secret conspiracy to overthrow Christian civilization." (p.43) If one wanted to be a good southern Christian, he dared not act like one. It was felt that the very first time Negroes were given the right to vote, to have decent employment, to have a decent home and to receive a quality education that this would lead to a mongrelization of civilization and thus prove to be the ruination of America. People were afraid that doing the right and decent thing was in effect aiding the communist conspiracy. Good white people who harbored no ill will against the Negro were cowered into tacitly supporting this insane contradiction. The system fed on itself.

But Griffin does not offer this odyssey as an indictment against southern peers but only to facilitate the coming together of good and decent men of both races who were trying to bridge this abyss of hate and despair with understanding and compassion. By lancing this boil of racial distrust and enmity and allowing the contents to spew into the public consciousness, Griffin sought to enhance communication, at a peer level, across racial lines.

Black Like Me is one of the thirty most frequently censored books throughout America.[4] Referred to as the "dirty thirty" by several scholars, these books have been banned based on objections to the moral values, religious ideas, violence and racial ideas that they examine. Black Like Me, in its explication of the viscera of the Southern racial situation in the late 1950s, provides an appropriate baseline with which to assess racial progress during the past quarter century. Griffin's rendering of this unsavory part of the American past is sensitive and balanced. The picture he draws, although graphic in its detail, neither paints all blacks as saints or all whites as sinners; he does an excellent job of capturing the hopes, fears and stereotypes of both groups.

In the Stygian night of racial intolerance, he is able to provide us with beacons of racial progress. This work's primary value is that it is able to uncover—often in obtuse and indirect ways—the humanity of both blacks and whites. While the Negro was locked in racial bondage, whites were constrained by psychological shackles, often not knowing why. Though the book presents elements of pessimism and numerous human tragedies, it is uplifting in the sense that it does present hope for the future. As fact, the book's purpose is to articulate the contradiction and irrationality of racist behavior in order to stimulate change. Its appeal to the essential decency of white Americans was, in part, reinforced via the non-violent resistance against racial discrimination led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Griffin, simply, was advocating only "that this country rid itself of the racism that prevented some citizens from living as fully functioning men and as a result dehumanized all men." (p. 185) He poked holes in the shields of patriotism, religion and innate racial inferiority that many Americans had used to justify the Negro's oppression. Moreover, the long suffering heroes in this book emerge from both the victim and oppressor classes. While many Negroes succumbed to the weight of subjugation, numerous whites were destroyed socially and financially for just being fair.

What Griffin shows us thoughout his odyssey is a consistent "conspiracy of resistance" by Negroes and whites, as well, to the mandated system of racial inequality. The reader is presented on the one hand with a poor black sawmill worker, living on the financial edge and ensnared in the trap of discrimination, holding on to his dignity and aspirations for his family and, on the other, with a white newspaperman who refused to prostitute his conscience or his paper in defense of racial injustice. Both these men, unknown to each other, were engaged in their own little conspiracies against the system of segregration. These parallels and others throughout the book offer the most compelling reason for the inclusion of Black Like Me in our school libraries and on reading lists throughout our nation. We are shown passionately, but without hyperhole, that America's historical struggle with the race question has been a biracial one, that in the depths of "inhumanity and indecency" there are sterling examples of "humanity and decency"—those tenets of our experience by which we define ourselves and become whole. But even more important is the opportunity for the reader to understand the tortuous complexity of racial injustice. White bigots, moderates and liberals are shown to be as much victims of the process as are the Negroes. To the extent that this work can assist readers in understanding that America's racial problems are more than the contrast of good against evil, we shall all have been better served.

In addition, since all is not yet equal in the body politic, Black Like Me provides valuable lessons as to how we can proceed in general to make equality a reality. The specific examples that Griffin presents can aid all Americans in being more sensitive about racial stereotypes, well-meaning paternalistic initiatives and the destructive social and psychological impact of assessing people solely on the basis of their skin color, whether it be black, white, brown, red or yellow. The structure of the book, a diary/journal format, also makes for easy reading; high school students, in particular, should find this approach easy to follow, especially the slow readers. Unlike the situation in many of the books examining America's racial problems, racial epithets—nigger, ofay, etc.—are used sparingly and do not intrude upon the narrative, and the writing is simple, direct and devoid of excessive jargon. The early arguments against teaching this book, racial inaccuracy and inflamation of racial passions, have paled over time. In the twenty-five years since the book first appeared, there has been substantial, if not herculean, progress in American black/white relations. This fact in itself offers a solid justification for the reading and teaching of Black Like Me as it reminds us of from whence we have come and where we might wish to go in the area of societal equity.

Black Like Me can be profitably utilized in high school social science and literature classes in a focus on the human condition. In an increasingly desegregated American school system as compared to that at the time of the writing of this book, black and white youngsters can be guided in an honest exploration of the society in which they have lived and of the one which they will shape themselves. Black and white students can use this work as a prism through which to assess and refine their own views of American race relations. Most will find the vast majority of the racial injustices foreign to their personal experiences, and this can only bode well for the future of our country. Furthermore, the virulent indignities and injustices outlined by Griffin can be compared to and contrasted with the often subtle, insensitive racial slights of today. Students can come to appreciate the need to be respectful of individual, social and cultural differences. Are most whites racist? Are most blacks too defensive about their racial background? Has discrimination been almost eliminated? These are the questions that can be addressed in group discussions attendant to the reading of this book.

The most significant and productive use of Black Like Me is to apprise the reader of our ability to move forward in our national life. Social and racial progress subsequent to Griffin's experience has resulted in the dismantling of many of the barriers between the races. Several vestiges remain, however, and Black Like Me affirms the irreversibility of movement toward equality. There is really greater hope now for all Americans to have the opportunity to pursue the fullness of life, liberty and happiness. At the time of Griffin's sojourn into the black experience, despair was the modal outlook of the Negro; that feeling has been replaced, in large measure, by "something solid on which to build," (p. 208) a basis which says that black people will continue to move toward being an integral part of our nation in every aspect of its life.

The often harsh realism of Black Like Me enables its readers to grapple with and learn from a personal experience that encompasses what the late W.E.B. Dubois has labeled one of the most trenchant problems of twentieth century America—the problem of the color line. Finally, it is exceedingly important that both minority and majority citizens allow the maximum freedom for racially uncomfortable books and other materials. Whites have to be as tolerant of Black Like Me as blacks have to be of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Both groups will have to fight "what they perceive" as inappropriate stereotypes, and distortions of reality, not by suppression but "by presenting counterviews with vigor and clarity."[7] Books that present uncomfortable racial ideas must be fully explored in the classrooms of our nation so that we can understand them in the context of American history.[8] We have to be inordinately careful in circumscribing any aspect of any American's access to allegedly controversial materials if we are desirous of maintaining freedom for ourselves.

NOTES

[1] John Howard Griffin, Black Like Me (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960).

[2] In order to remain faithful to the context of Black Like Me (1960), the term Negro is often used instead of black. It is recognized that the latter term (or the label, Afro-American) is the preferred contemporary designation for Americans of African descent. The term "he" (and related terms) is also used throughout the essay for stylistic purposes and not to suggest a "sexist" orientation.

[3] Richard Wright, Native Son (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1940).

[4] Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1944).

[5] Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (New York: Random House, Inc. 1952).

[6] Lorin R. Robinson, "Scholars to Defend 'Dirty 30' Books," Milwaukee Journal, 28 August 1984, Part 2, p. 10.

[7] Robert M. O'Neil, "Some Second Thoughts on the First Amendment," Sims Lecture, University of New Mexico, February 25, 1982, p. 10.

[8] Editorial, "Missing Huck Finn's Message," Milwaukee Journal, 30 September 1984, p. 6 (Accent on the News).

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Huxley's *Brave New World* as Social Irritant: Ban It or Buy It?

It is obvious why someone who believes in censorship might choose to object to *Brave New World*. This world is a world of sexual promiscuity, a world with a drug culture in the most literal sense of that expression, a world in which the traditional family—in fact, any family at all—has been vilified and rendered taboo, a world in which religion has been reduced to orgiastic rituals of physical expression. It is a world in which art panders to the sensations of mass communications and a world in which the positive values of Western democracy have been ossified into a rigid caste system, in which the members of each caste are mass produced to the specifications of assembly line uniformity.[1]

Readers who have strict standards of sexual behavior, who believe in chaste courtships and monogamous, lifetime marriages confront in this novel a society in which sexual promiscuity is a virtue and in which the sole function of sexuality is pleasure, not reproduction. Since reproduction is achieved by an elaborate biogenetic mass production assembly line, the citizens of *Brave New World* do not need normal human sexual activity to propagate the species. In fact, such activity is discouraged by the state so that the carefully monitored population controls are not disrupted. Women are required to wear "Malthusian Belts"—convenient caches of birth control devices—in order to forego pregnancies. The sole function of sex in this society is pleasure, and the sole function of pleasure is to guarantee the happiness of *Brave New World* and thus assure a stable, controllable population. State encouraged promiscuity assures that loyalty to one's lover or family will not undermine one's loyalty to the state. Thus, "Everyone belongs to everyone else," and the highest compliment a man can offer a woman is that she is "very pneumatic"—a euphemism suggesting that her movements during sexual intercourse are especially pleasurable. Unlike Orwell, who in *1984* placed severe taboos on sexual activities, since as private and personal act it might permit or encourage rebellion against the state, Huxley prophesizes that in the future the state will use sex as a means of population control on the basis of the psychological truism that men and women condition themselves to avoid pain and to seek pleasure.

Lest the pleasure of frequent and promiscious sexual activity not be sufficient to distract the population and dissuade them from rebellion, Huxley foresees a culture in which widespread and addictive use of drugs offers a second means of assuring a frictionless society. "A Soma in time saves nine,"—a hypnopaedic slogan drilled into the heads of Brave New Worldians from nursery days on—conveys the message that one is to protect himself from normal pain by frequent doses of this widely available and socially acceptable narcotic.

One of the most important uses for Soma is to insulate people from the effects of rapid aging which afflict *Brave New World* inhabitants after an artificially induced period of extended youth. In this "perfect" society—the future as heaven—most of the human qualitites of life have been altered and adapted so that they are devoid of crisis and pain. Just as the inhabitants of this world age only during a brief period shortly before death and just as the drug which eases them through this period has no unpleasant side effects, so they are insulated against the normal stresses and tensions of family life. They have no parents to contend with since in Huxley's inspired anticipation of the consequences of biogenetic engineering, they are conceived through artificial insemination, carried in assembly line placentas made of sow's peritoneum, and decanted rather than born. *Brave New World* inhabitants spend their nursery years in state-run institutions where they are conditioned for future life. Those normal mortals who recall the pain of adolesence would be spared such in *Brave New World*; there is no adolesence. As adults, the inhabitants enjoy youth and vitality until near the time of their deaths. People never have to contend with the stress of accommodating themselves to the authority of parents, nor do they know the stress, pain, heartache—nor the joy—of nurturing and raising children.

The birth and childhood of *Brave New World* inhabitants is greatly reduced from the human world in which we daily live. After perusing the early chapters of this novel, the sensitive reader becomes aware that reduction is one of its recurrent themes, and that this reduction usually involves those attributes of life which make us most human. The purpose behind these reductions is to make all existence subservient to the state. Such subservience requires that even such basic institutions of human civilization as religion and art be sapped of their vital force.

With lives so void of pain and so concentrated in the physical and the immediate present, the Worldians have little need for the comfort or solace of religion. If religion is that aspect of man's culture which speaks to the spirit, then Worldians have an absence of spirit of which they are unaware. The reduction of religion is symbolized in the icon which replaces the cross as the dominant religious image—a T. The worship of a supernatural saviour has been supplanted by worship of a lord of the assembly line, Henry Ford, and the sign of Our Ford is taken from the model name of one of his early cars. The four arms of the cross have been reduced to the three arms of the T.

Religion lends continuity to civilization, and so does art. Each is an important constituent of the emotional component of human life. But, like religion, art in *Brave New World* has been reduced to trafficking in sensation—slight, transitory, physical responses as opposed to the profound, sustained, psychological responses of emotion. The "Feelies"—*Brave New World's* multi-sensory version of the movies—well illustrates this pandering to sensation; rather than celebrating the ideas and emotions of human life, the "Feelies" are designed to give its participants a sensory overload of neural stimulation—the sight and feel of bare flesh on a bearskin rug, for example.

Thus art and religion are controlled by the state and subordinated to the support of the state, but the nature of that state is quite different from what a reader, in this year of George Orwell, 1984, might expect. In the ideological tensions of the '80's, citizens of Western Democracies see their form of government as the best form yet developed by man. As Huxley projects this important facet of human life into the future, he foresees neither Western Democracy nor its ideological competitor, Eastern Communism, as the most likely political system. Instead of either he sees a five-tiered caste system occasioned through the perfection of biogenetic engineering and other modern devices of social control. Every man is created biologically equal to all others in his caste. The leisured classes are conditioned to consume, and the working classes are conditioned to manufacture what those other classes consume. Society functions almost as simply as the physical law of equal and opposite reactions.

If Huxley had perversely set out to oversimplify and reduce the most important philosophical and scientific ideas of modern times to a facile society representing a serious projection of what the world will surely become, then one might at least understand the objections of those who seek to censor the book. Neither Marx nor the founders of Western Democracy prevail. The Worldians seem to extrapolate from some of the world's great religions—Islam, Christianity, Judaism—such belief as is useful for their purpose. Freud's insights into family relationships are read only in their negative connotations, and these connotations then become the basis for social organization. Darwin's discoveries about adaptation and heredity are seen not as patterns for understanding how nature works but rather as patterns for manipulating nature to nefarious ends. The history of modern technology culminates in a culture where man eases his way through life on drugs, is free of painful involvement with other human beings, and is sustained by the state's manipulation of mass consumption and mass comunication.

But Huxley does not offer Brave New World as an ideal. Neither does he render it as an idle fantasy portraying what life might be like in the future. Brave New World is a satire, and the pleasurable perfection of society in A.F. 689 is measured against the norm of Twentieth Century society in general and against the norm of a particular primitive society still currently extant. Brave New World has its critics both from within and without. The critic from within is Bernard Marx. Because of some abnormality in his birthing process, he is not a perfect Alpha specimen, which suggests that human imperfection and mechanical malfunction have not been completely eliminated in this brave new world. The critic from without is John Savage. As the child of Linda from the dominant culture and the adopted son of an Indian on a reservation in the American Southwest, he is a half-breed belonging to neither the progressive nor the traditional societies in the book.

Marx introduces some of the universal human norms in the book. He is in the society, but not of it. He is physically smaller than other members of his caste—the dominant Alphas—and this physical distinction seems to generate in him envy and alienation, which are uncommon in the society. He rebels against his superior, and when he finds Linda and her son on the reservation and discovers her past association with his superior, he brings them back to the "World" in order to humiliate his boss. Though he has a professional, psychological interest in the two, he is so flattered by the attention he receives because of his connection with the famous pair that he begins to pander to the society of which he has previously been so harshly critical. Marx is important in a technical sense because it is from his point of view that we see the activities of the society—activities which he both participates in and criticizes.

John, or the savage, articulates the values of both a minority culture, the American Indians, and of the culture of the past. To the degree to which he has assimilated the culture of the Indians, he is a child of nature communicant with the earth, sky, wind and water. He is free of the artificial and urban environment in which Bernard spends his life. Though his mother is from the dominant society, John is born outside that society and thus escapes its state-supported brainwashing nurture and its prescriptions against artifacts of earlier times. His education he obtains from the Bible and Shakespeare—two of the most important cultural forces in modern Western civilization. It is by the norms of this literature that he executes his criticism of this "Brave New World."

Bernard and John convey to the reader the dilemma of modern life which Huxley expresses in the novel. Through their knowledge humans gain greater and greater control over their environment. As they gain control and are better able to manage their own destiny, they also greatly increase the danger of losing their humanity—the sum total of those facets of life by which people define and know themselves. This point is literally and symbolically illustrated through the tragic conclusion of the novel. John falls victim to that most human of human emotions—love. Yet his love for Lenina Crown he cannot reconcile in a satisfactory way. John cannot accept her as "pneumatic" as "belonging to everybody else" after the fashion of his mother's culture. Nor can he remold her into the image of the beloved he holds from the Biblical and Shakespearean cultural guides he learned in his childhood. John is caught out of time. He cannot go back to his old culture, nor can he assimilate the new. His only option in a world where he has become a freak to be gawked at is suicide. As his body swings from the rope gyrating toward all points of the compass, Huxley suggests that we too may be creating a world in which ironically there is no place for human life and for human emotion.

One of the objectors to this novel comments on its pessimism and tragedy as reasons why it should not be taught. Such an objection overlooks the tone of the book. As satire, the book's purpose is to examine the failings of man's behavior in order to encourage him to reform. Such examinations are painful when we recognize our faults through them. But pain and growth and regeneration are part of the human condition and prove that Huxley's prophesy has not yet come true. And certainly if we try to prevent people—especialy young people—from being exposed to the tragic we would have to eliminate much world literature which has been universally proclaimed great.

Any valid arguments against teaching this book seem to be aesthetic and pedagogical rather than moral. Particularly at the high school level one might opt not to teach the book to some students because of its vocabulary, its form, or its genre. Since the book touches on some important scientific and philosphical ideas, the vocabulary is sometimes academic and abstract. The specific detail with which Huxley describes biogenetic processes requires one to become familiar with a few scientific terms not current in the general vocabulary. The form of the book, especially the opening pages, may discourage a slow or naive reader. Huxley uses a film-montage type of narration to cut back and forth between several conversations that are taking place in different locations. Until one understands this technique the opening passages seem chaotic and unintelligible. The genre of science fiction requires that students use their imaginations. Unless readers are prepared to suspend their disbelief and be ready to accept the givens of a world in which the modes of social and economic behavior are quite different from those of the real world, then they may not want to read very far.

Having stated these caveats, I find far greater justification for reading and teaching Brave New World. Many of the cultural concerns discussed in this novel are still matters of great importance to thinking people in general and to young people in particular. In the fifty plus years since Huxley first published this book, some of his prophesies seem far more plausible than they did in 1932. The greater reliability and increased availability of contraceptives, for example, has radically changed sexual attitudes and behavior. A study of the novel might lead to an examination of the concepts of romantic love set forth by John as opposed to the promiscuity practiced by the inhabitants of Brave New World. The drug culture of Brave New World could be compared to and contrasted with the problems of drug abuse and addiction in contemporary society. Is Soma acceptable because it has no bad side effects? Do people sacrifice their human potential when they subject themselves to mind or mood altering drugs? Do humans deny life when they resort to artificial means to avoid pain?

The most significant and fruitful vehicle for discussion that the novel offers is biogenetic engineering. In this regard more so than any other Huxley's prophesy seems to be coming true. What are the consequences of man's efforts to control the genetic composition of human offspring? Do we gain or lose by knowing the sex of a child before it is born? What are the moral considerations in pre-natal testing of fetuses? In in vitro fertilization? In test tube babies? What are the long range social, economic, and political consequences of continued experimentation in biogenetic engineering?

Such questions as these suggest the potential of the novel to provoke discussion about events within the novel and their relationship to events in the lives of its readers.

NOTES

[1] A report in the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom summarizes most of the objections to this book raised over the last twenty years. In this instance, the complaining parents claimed that "the book is depressing, fatalistic, and negative, and that it encourages students to adopt a lifestyle of drugs, sex and conformity, reinforcing helpless feelings that they can do nothing to make an impact on their world." See the Newsletter, September, 1981, p. 127.

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The Catcher in the Rye

Censorship and the Values of Fiction *

To the teacher, any attempt by outsiders to censor teaching materials is self-evidently wrong. To the censor, it is self-evident that a responsible society must supervise what is taught to its children. Little wonder, then, that attacks on "censorship," like defenses of "responsible supervision of materials," too often assume what they set out to prove: addressed to those who are already converted, they may be useful for enspiriting the troops, but far too often they do nothing to breach the enemy's line.

To convert any "enemy," we must show him not simply that respectability, or tradition, or the National Council of Teachers of English are against him but that he is wrong, wrong according to his own fundamental standards. To tell him that he is wrong according to *our* standards gets us nowhere, though it may be great fun; the problem is to find, somewhere among *his* standards, at least one that is violated by what he proposes to do.

In dealing with censors, as with other enemies, it may very well be that the enemy is in fact so far beyond reason that there is no possible point of contact. But if we assume, as I think we must, that at least some of the would-be censors are men of good-will whose values, at certain points, coincide with ours, then we must work at the extremely difficult task of showing them that even according to their own values, the effort to censor is misguided.

The sources for such points of contact—and hence of real rather than merely self-comforting arguments—are many. Most censors want to preserve some form of society in which they can exercise their own freedom; we can argue, following Mill and many others, that the kind of society the censor *really* wants cannot be maintained if his kind of censorship prevails. Similarly, most censors respect and seek to further the "truth" as they see it, and some of them can be shaken by arguing, with Milton and others, that truth flourishes best when ideas can compete freely. Or again, many censors, irrational as they may seem to us, respect consistency and would like to think of themselves as reasonable; they can be shaken, sometimes, by showing the inevitable irrationalities and stupidities committed by any society that attempts to censor.

Every teacher in America today owes it to himself to have ready, either in his mind or in his files, a portfolio of these and other arguments against censorship, fleshed out, of course, with the details that alone can make them convincing. He can never know when the censors will move in his direction, nor can he know in advance which of his supply of arguments will be effective in a given crisis. But he can know that unless he has thought the issues through, he is likely, when the attack comes, to stand tongue-tied. Of course he may go under anyway, no matter how well-prepared his defense, if the censor will not listen to his reasons; one should have no illusions about the easy triumph of freedom or truth, in any market place, open or closed. But even if the censor wins, there should be some comfort in knowing that one has at least said what can be said for the free teacher, freely choosing his own materials.

SPECIFIC DEFENSES NECESSARY

Since many censorship drives begin with attacks on specific works, an important and often neglected section of one's "Freedom Portfolio" ought to deal with some such heading as "The Moral Quality of Individual Works." Though censorship cases are seldom fought without some appeal to general political and social arguments that apply to all cases, they would more often be won if, at the first threat of attack on any one work, the teacher had a battery of specific defenses ready for a battle.

What is usually offered in place of such specific arguments, is a standard collection of highly general claims, already known to the censor, about the moral value of literature. There is good reason why such claims do not convince. For one thing, some literature is *not* moral, and there is even much good—that is, clever—literature which is quite obviously at odds with any moral values the censor can be expected to care about. For another, most literature, even of the most obviously moral kind, is potentially harmful to somebody, as Thomas Hardy pointed out in defense of Tess of the D'Urbervilles, The censors are thus always on safe ground, from their own point of view, so long as we talk about all literature, or even all "good" literature. Even the most ridiculous attacks—say those on Robin Hood—have this much validity: it is *conceivable* that such a work might alter a child's beliefs, and if we admit this, we must also admit that the alteration might be "for the worse," according to the censor's values. The child who reads Robin Hood might decide to rob from the rich and give to the poor, or he might even decide to support a progressive income tax. We do no service to our cause if we pretend, as some have done, that literature cannot have such effects because it does not deal with beliefs. Any literary work that we really read will play upon our basic beliefs, and even though fundamental changes of belief produced by novels may be rarer among mature readers than among novices, it would be foolish to pretend that they do not occur. If the change is "for the worse," from the censor's point of view, then the work has done harm, and it should be banned.

In contrast to our general claims, the censor usually has some specific danger in mind which is directly and literally related to something he has seen in the text. He has found profanity or obscenity or depravity, and we tell him that the book will, like all "good books," do the students good. In Austin, Texas, a pastor who was testifying in a hearing against Andersonville read aloud a long sequence of cuss words, excerpted from widely separated bits of the novel. The committee was quite properly horrified. The book they "read" was a bad book by any criterion, and certainly it would be a bad book to teach. But the horrifying fact about the episode[1] is not that the committee members were offended by what they had heard but that none of them had enough gumption to read so much as a single page of the real book straight through. It would do no good to say to such committeemen, when the preacher was finished, that *Andersonville* is really a highly moral work; the "book" which they experienced was not. Similarly it does no good to say to the censor of *The Catcher in the Rye* that it is really "calling for a good world in which people can *connect*—a key word in twentieth-century" writing.[2] One can picture the reactions of the irate parent who has discovered the obscenities in *Catcher* as he reads the following defense of the morality of fiction-in-general:

> When the student learns to see great books, classic or contemporary, as metaphors for the whole of human experience, the study of literature contributes in a unique way to this understanding of these traditions. They help him to discover who he is and where he is going.
>
> An abstraction may have little emotional impact. But the dramatization of an abstraction, of concepts and values, offers us something we can grasp. We begin to feel and understand the abstraction.[3]

Now here is something for the parent really to worry about: if *Catcher* is on his mind, he will think that we teachers are treating its profanity and obscenity as standing for "the whole of human experience," suitable to help his child "to understand who he is and where he is going"! It is surely no comfort to tell him that literature, by dramatizing the experience of profanity and obscenity, makes it have more emotional impact.

The obscene phrase that Holden tries to erase from the school walls toward the end of *Catcher* is concrete, literal, visible; our "defenses of poesie" tend to be abstract, metaphoric, intangible. We must somehow make them seem to the censor as real as the abuses he has found, but to do so will never be easy. To be concrete and specific about the moral values even of a short poem is terribly difficult, and the precise inferences through which a good reader constructs his reading of a complete novel are so complex that it is no wonder we draw back from the effort to describe them. Yet it is only by learning to follow such processes for himself—that is, by learning how to read—that the censor can discover what we really mean by the morality or immorality of a work. Unless those who wield educational power know at first hand what we mean when we say that a literary work can be moral even though many of its elements are to them objectionable, the other defenses against censorship may finally fail.

I have a frequently recurring fantasy in which I am called before a censorship committee and asked to justify my teaching of such-and-such a book. As hero of my own dream, I see myself starting on page one of whatever book is attacked and reading aloud, with commentary and discussion, page by page, day by day, until the censors either lynch me or confess to a conversion.

A pipedream, clearly. And the one I use for substitute is not much less fantastic. An irate committeeman comes to me (I am a very young instructor in a highly vulnerable school district), and he threatens to have me fired for teaching *The Catcher in the Rye* (or *Huckleberry Finn*, or *Catch-22*—one can of course mold one's daydreams to suit current events). I look him boldly in the eye and I ask him one question: "Will you, before you fire me, do me one last favor? Will you read carefully a little statement I have made about the teaching of this book, and then reread the book?" And since it is fantasy, he says, "Well, I don't see why not. I want to be reasonable." And away he goes, bearing my neatly typed manuscript and my marked copy of *Catcher*. Some hours later he comes back, offers his humble apologies for what he calls his "foolish mistake," and returns my manuscript. Here it is.

WHAT TO DO WITH A LITERARY WORK BEFORE DECIDING TO CENSOR IT

Let us begin by assuming that we ought to censor all books that we think are immoral. Learned men have offered many arguments against this assumption (you might want to take a look at Milton's *Areopagitica*, John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, or the NCTE pamphlet, *The Students' Right to Read*, a copy of which I can lend you), but other learned and wise men, like Plato and Tolstoy, have accepted it, and we can do the same—at least for a time. What should determine whether a book is among those we want to censor?

The question will not arise, of course, unless you have found, as in *Catcher*, something objectionable. There you have found such things as teenagers speaking profanities, the phrase "Fuck you"—repeated!—and a schoolboy visit to a prostitute.

It must seem to you that I am being merely perverse when I say that such a book is really highly moral, when "read properly." I know that you cannot spend the time that would be required for this experience, and the principal probably wouldn't allow it even if you could. But there are certain things you can do, on your own, to discover what a "proper reading" of this book might be.

The big job is to relate the seemingly offensive passages to the context provided by the whole work. To say this is not, as you might think, merely a trick to sidestep the true issues. We all relate literary parts to their contexts all the time, almost without thinking about it. If someone told us that a book talked openly about nakedness, we might, if we are worried by pornography, begin to worry. But we are not troubled to read "I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me." The context has transformed both the word "naked" and the concept of nakedness to obviously moral uses. Similarly, when we read about the woman "taken in adultery," caught "in the very act," we do not ask that the reading be changed to something less specific. Not only do we take for granted the piety of the Bible—something we do not and cannot do for Catcher—but the immediate context in John viii quite evidently requires a forceful statement of the nature of the sin that is being forgiven. If you doubt this, try substituting some lesser sin—say gossiping—for adultery in the passage, or some euphemism like "caught flirting with another woman's husband."

When we read the many other specific accounts of sexual abuses that the Bible contains—of seduction, incest, sodomy, rape, and what not—we do not put the Bible on the list of banned books, because we know that the context requires an honest treatment of man's vices, and that it at the same time changes the very effect of naming them. Though we might question the wisdom of teaching particular sections of the Bible to children of a particular age, we would never think of firing a teacher simply for "teaching the Bible." We would want at the very least to know what the teacher was doing with it. We know the context, in this case, and consequently we know there is at least one book with many bad things in it that is still a good book.

It is exactly this same claim that we teachers want to make about a book like Catcher in the Rye (though few of us would want to go as far as one theologian who has called it a piece of "modern scripture"). But since the claim is much harder to substantiate with a long work like a novel, I want to begin with a look at how the process of transformation works in a short simple poem. Any poem with possible offensive elements would do, but I have chosen a highly secular one that is likely to offend in several ways: "ugUDuh,' by E.E. Cummings.

ygUDuh
ydoan
yunnuhstan
ydoan o
yunnuhstan
yguduh ged
yunnuhstan dem doidee
yguduh ged riduh
ydoan onudn
LISN bud LISN
dem
gud
am
lidl yelluh bas
tuds weer goin
duhSIVILEYEzum.

This poem may very well seem unintelligible to you on first reading. I've seen a class of high school seniors flounder with it—until I asked one of them to read it aloud. But then they worked out something like the following "translation" (though there was usually some unresolved debate about whether it is spoken by one speaker or two):

You've got to
You don't
Do you understand?
You don't know
Do you understand those
You've got to get
Do you understand? Those dirty
You've got to get rid of
You don't know anything
LISTEN, Bud, LISTEN
Those
God
damn
little yellow bas-
tards, we're going
To CIVILIZE them.

Now that the poem is out in the open, as it were (though limping badly), it obviously offers several possible kinds of offense. We can imagine, first of all, a National Association for the Advancement of Yellow Peoples rising in protest against the offending phrase *yellow bastards*, just as the NAACP of Brooklyn had Huckleberry Finn banned because it refers to Jim constantly as Nigger Jim. What right has a poet to use such language, degrading a whole people? Even though the poem was obviously written in wartime, when tempers ran high, that is no excuse for descending to such abuse.

"The context of the whole poem" provides an answer to this imaginary protest. Does Cummings, the poet, call the Japanese "yellow bastards"? Obviously not. There is a speaker, dramatized for our literary observation, a speaker whose tongue bewrayeth him, with every half-word that speweth out of his mouth. It is this speaker from whom the whole content of our paraphrase comes: he it is who would take those yellow bastards and civilize them. What *Cummings* says, of course, is provided only by inference from the way in which the statement is conveyed. The speaker provides, in many signs of his brutish inarticulateness, evidence that Cummings is as greatly opposed to his foolish bigotry as the president of the NAAYP might be. And of course, the poet expects us to take pleasure in the comic contrast between the speaker's lack of civilization and his bold program.

If the members of the NAAYP still feel dissatisfied with our effort to place the line in its dramatic context, claiming that they simply would prefer not to see such language in print, we can only ask, "Would you prefer that bigots who hate your group be portrayed more politely, hence more favorably, and hence more deceptively?" It is clear that as the poem stands, the more crudely the bigot is portrayed the stronger the indictment. Is it not likely that a student subjected to this poem in a literature course would come out of his experience *more* sensitive to the issue of bigotry, and *less* willing to accept the crudities of bigots than before?

Other readers, as we have learned in various censorship hearings, will object to the profanity. But again we see that the "poem" is no more profane than it is bigoted; it is the speaker who is profane. The purist may still say that he does not want profanity presented even as part of an indictment, but I have not noticed that censorship hearings have been marked by the censors' reluctance to speak the words they object to.

STEPS FOR THE GOOD CENSOR

Though the steps we have taken so far with this peom by no means exhaust what the good teacher would want to bring out in discussing it, they show very well what the good censor will want to do before carrying out his job.

(1) He will refuse to draw any conclusions whatever from any element of a work taken out of its context. This means that he will read the whole work.

(2) He will not be satisfied with one reading. When a work is assigned and discussed in class, it receives several "readings," sometimes quite literally and always in the sense that first impressions are modified by sustained reflection. As a class progresses, a poem, play, or novel is traversed by the alert student again and again. What the censor should be interested in is what the student will get after such reflective rereading, not the errors he might fall into if he read the work without the teacher's encouragement to thoughtful rereading. But of course this means that the censor himself must go through the same process. Any censor who rejected "ug U Duh" on one reading would be a very foolish censor indeed.

(3) The true values of a work—the real moral center which we may or may not want to rule out of our children's experience—cannot usually be identified with the expressed values of any one character. What we might call the author's values, the *norms* according to which he *places* his characters' values, are always more complex than those of any one of the characters he invents. To censor the Bible because Satan plays a prominent and sometimes even dominant and persuasive role would be absurd. It is equally absurd to censor any book for expressed values which are, for the proper reader, repudiated by the author's implied criticism.

If these three points apply to a short minor poem like "ug U Duh" they are even more applicable to the more complex reading tasks presented by long fiction.

The degree of difficulty varies, of course, depending on the reader and the work. It is easy for most readers to recognize, for example, that Mark Twain does not himself use the word "nigger" in Huckleberry Finn. "We blowed out a cylinder-head," says Huck. "Good gracious!" says Aunt Sally. "Anybody hurt?" "No'm. Killed a nigger." The whole point of this episode, coming as it does long after Huck has been forced by experience to recognize the nobility of "nigger Jim," is that even Huck cannot resist thinking as he has been taught to think. Huck here not only uses the word nigger, but reduces "niggers" to less than human standing.[4] But it is not hard—at least for a white man—to see that Mark Twain is far from making the same mistake; indeed, he would have no point in relating the episode except to show a lapse from his own values.

A Negro reader is given a more difficult task. To place the offensive word or concept into its transforming context requires a kind of dispassionate attentiveness that his own involvement with words like "nigger" may easily destroy. The word sets off responses which, though appropriate to most occasions when it is used, are totally inappropriate to the very special use that Mark Twain has made of it. It is likely that every reader sooner or later encounters books that he misreads in exactly this way. And it is highly unlikely that we will ever discover our own errors of this kind, because the very nature of our fault, with its strong emotional charge, keeps us from listening to those who might set us straight.

THE CATCHER AS EXAMPLE

With all of this as background, suppose we turn now to your objections to The Catcher in the Rye. You said that you objected to the printing of the obscene phrase that Holden tries to erase. But in the light of your objections to the book, it is surely strange to find that you and Holden have the same feelings about this phrase: you would both like to get rid of it.

> It drove me damn near crazy. I thought how Phoebe and all the other little kids would see it, and how they'd wonder what the hell it meant, and then finally some dirty kid would tell them—all cockeyed, naturally—what it meant, and how they'd all think about it and maybe even *worry* about it for a couple of days. I kept wanting to kill whoever'd written it.

Holden could hardly be more strongly opposed to the phrase; it is significant, surely, that throughout the scene from which this passage is taken, the tone is entirely serious—there is none of the clowning that marks Holden's behavior in many other passages. But this immediate context cannot in itself be decisive; though it is unequivocal about Holden's serious repudiation of the phrase which *you* repudiate, the *author* after all does print the phrase and not some euphemism, and this surely suggests that he is not so seriously offended by the phrase, in itself, as you and Holden are.

Clearly we are driven to thinking about what kind of character the author has created for us, in his lost wild boy. What kind of person is it who, a moment later, concludes that his effort to wipe out the obscenities of the world is "hopeless, anyway," because they are unlimited.

You said this afternoon that you found him to be a terrible person. But supposing we begin from the other direction and ask ourselves why young readers find him, as they do (I have yet to find an exception), so entirely sympathetic. When I ask my adolescent students why they like Holden so much, they usually say, "Because he is so real" or "Because he is so honest." But it takes no very deep reading to find many additional virtues that win them to him, virtues that even you and I must admire. It is true that his honest, or rather his generally unsuccessful but valiant attempt at honesty, is striking. But a far stronger magnet for the reader's affections is his tremendous capacity for love, expressed in deeds that would do credit to a saint. The book opens, for example, with his visit, extremely distasteful to him, to the sick and aging history teacher. Holden knows that the old man loves him and needs him, just as he needs the love of the old man; it is out of real feeling that he subjects himself to the sights and smells of age and illness. The moral sensitivity revealed in this scene is maintained through the book. Again and again Holden reveals himself—often in direct contradiction of his own claims—to be far more sensitive than most of us to the feelings of others. He "feels sorry" for all the outsiders, and he hates the big shots who, like the Headmaster, allot their attentions according to social importance and try to shut out those who are fat, pimply, poor, or corny. He has genuine affection even for the Ackley and Stradlaters ("I sort of *miss* everybody I told about"), and he is extraordinarily generous, not only with his possessions (almost everything he owns is on loan to some other boy) but with himself (he is the only boy who thinks of including the impossible Ackley in the trip to the movies). Though he often hurts others, he never does so intentionally ("I was sorry as hell I'd kidded her. Some people you shouldn't kid, even if they deserve it.") His heroes are those who are able to love unselfishly—Christ, Mr. Antolini, his sister—or those who, like James Castle, show moral courage. His enemies are those who deliberately inflict pain—for example, the boys who drive Castle to suicide.

A full catalog of his virtues and good works would be unfair to the book, because it would suggest a solemn kind of sermonizing very different from the special Catcher brand of affectionate comedy. But it is important to us in talking about possible censorship of the book to see its seeming immoralities in the context of Holden's deep morality.

The virtue most pertinent to the obscene phrase is of course Holden's struggle for purity. The soiled realities of the "phony" world that surrounds him in his school and in the city are constantly contrasted in his mind with the possible ideal world that has not been plastered with obscenities. His worrying about what Stradlater has done to Jane, his fight with Stradlater, his inability to carry through with the prostitute because he "feels sorry" for her, his lecture to himself about the crudities he watches through the hotel windows, his effort to explain to Luce that promiscuity destroys love—these are all, like his effort to erase the obscenity, part of his struggle to find "a place that's nice and peaceful," a world that is "nice and white." Though he himself soils, with his fevered imagination, the pure gesture of Antolini, revealing how helplessly embedded he is in another kind of world altogether, his ideal remains something like the world of the nuns, or the world of a Christ who will not condemn even Judas to eternal damnation. He is troubled, you will remember, when one of the nuns talks about Romeo and Juliet, because that play "gets pretty sexy in some parts, and she was a nun and all." Nuns ought to live in the pure, sexless, sinless, trouble-free world of his ideal, just as his sister ought to live in a world unsullied by nasty scrawlings on stairway walls.

All of this—the deep Christian charity and the search for an ideal purity—is symbolized in his own mind by the desire to be a catcher in the rye. He wants to save little children from falling, even though he himself, as he comes to realize, is a child who needs to be saved. The effort to erase the words is thus an ultimate, desperate manifestation of his central motive. Though it is a futile gesture, since the world will never in this respect or any other conform fully to Holden's ideal of purity, it is produced by the very qualities in his character which make it possible for him to accept his sister's love at the end, give up his mad scheme of going west, and allow himself to be saved by love. It is clear that he is, for his sister, what she has become for him: a kind of catcher in the rye. Though he cannot protect her from knowledge of the world, though he cannot, as he would like, put her under a glass museum case and save her from the ravages of the sordid, time-bound world, he can at least offer her the love that comes naturally to him. He does so and he is saved. Which is of course why he is ecstatically happy at the end.

Now none of this is buried very deep in the novel. I've not had to probe any mystical world of symbols or literary trickery to find it out; it is all evident in the actions and words of Holden himself, and it is grasped intuitively, I have found, by most teenage readers. Their misreadings are caused, in fact, by carrying this line too far: they often overlook Holden's deficiencies.

So strong is the persuasive power of his obvious virtues (obvious to them) that they overlook his limitations of understanding and his destructive weaknesses: they take him at his word. They tend to overlook the strong and unanswerable criticism offered by his sister ("You don't like *any*thing that's happening") and by Antolini, who tries to teach him how to grow up ("The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one"). They also overlook the author's many subtle contrasts between what Holden says and what he does. In learning to read these and other built-in criticisms, students can learn to criticize their own immaturities. They learn that such a book has been read only when they have seen Holden's almost saint-like capacity for love and compassion in the light of his urge to destroy the world, and even himself. because it cannot live up to his dreams.

I am aware that what I have said does not "prove" that Catcher is harmless. I'm sure there are some young people who might be harmed by it, just as reading the Bible has been known to work great harm on young idealists given to fanaticism. I have not even "proved" that the book can be beneficial. Only your own reading can convince you of that; again I find myself wishing that you could reread the work with us, in class. But perhaps you will return to it now and try once more, moving from page 1 to page 277, thinking about Holden's moral life as you go.

I know I do not have to ask you (the dream continues) for your decision. As a man of honor, you can only have carried out our little experiment to the letter, and the book is now cleared of all suspicion. I should not be surprised if your experience has also made you wonder about other books you have suspected in the past.

You may have guessed by now that I have been inching my way all this while toward a repudiation of our original assumption. Is there really a place for *any* censorship other than the teacher's careful choice? The skill required to decide whether a work is suited for a particular teaching moment is so great that only the gifted teacher, with his knowledge of how his teaching aims relate to materials chosen for students at a given stage of development, can be trusted to exercise it.

Such a teacher can be trusted even when he chooses to teach works that reveal themselves, under the closest reading, to be immoral to the core. Let us suppose that you have performed the kind of reading I have described on a given work, say Peyton Place or one of Mickey Spillane's thrillers, and you find that it does not, as with Catcher, have any defense to offer for itself: it is immoral no matter how one looks at it. So you go to the teacher to insist that the book be removed from the reading list. You should not be surprised if the teacher replies: "Oh, yes, I quite agree with you. Peyton Place is inherently an immoral work; there are, in fact, far worse things in it than the few sexual offenses you object to. Read carelessly by high school students, it could do tremendous harm—like other books of the same kind. That's why I insist on spending some time, in my advanced sections, on this particular kind of shoddiness. I find that most of my students have read the juicier sections on their own, anyway. By placing those pornographic bits back into the shoddy context from which they have been torn, the student soon comes to treat Metalious' commercial sensationalism with the contempt it deserves.

So you see, sir (the drama has by now shifted, dream-like from manuscript to real-life drama, and I am hearty, confident, even slightly patronizing as I fling one arm across his shoulder), the only person who can conduct the fight for good literature is the person who has some chance of knowing what he is doing: the sensitive, experienced teacher. He it is who...

Dreams of wish fulfillment always end with a rude awakening. My dream ends with the admission that even with the best of luck my argument about Catcher would do no more than shake a censor's confidence in his own judgment. Wide awake, I know that many censors will only scoff at any efforts we may make to reason about the issues of censorship. But as I write these final lines, in South Africa, in August, 1963, I do not doubt for a moment that even an ineffectual defense of freedom is better than no defense at all.

[1] As reported in The Censors and the Schools, by Jack Nelson and Gene Roberts, Jr. (Boston, 1963), pp. 136-37.

[2] This phrasing was in an early draft of the excellent NCTE pamphlet, The Students' Right to Read (1962). Every teacher should own and use this pamphlet, but it does not, even in the revised form, show the censor why we misguided teachers are so thoroughly convinced that immoral books are moral books.

[3] The Students' Right To Read, p. 11.

[4] A possible alternative reading would see Huck as himself master of the ironies here. Since he is author of his own anecdote, he may be thought of as choosing a moral language which he knows will be convincing to his auditor. Regardless of how we read the passage, Mark Twain is clearly guiltless, even from the passionately pro-Negro viewpoint.

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The Catcher in the Rye—What Are We Counting?

In his book Censors in the Classroom (Avon, 1982), Edward B. Jenkinson tells of a woman in Issaquak, Washington, who led a campaign to ban The Catcher in the Rye from high school classrooms. According to Jenkinson, the woman claimed to have counted 785 "profanities" in the book, including 222 "hells," 27 "Chrissakes," and seven "hornys." The other vulgarities apparently were the numerous "bastards," "damns," "craps," and "goddams" along with the several "fucks." In any event, the fact that the woman actually went through the book to tabulate all the offensive words indicates a purposefulness, a dedication to task, that, under other circumstances, we all might consider laudatory.

But in the light of the woman's position that the teaching of the book brainwashes students and is "part of an overall Communist plot in which a lot of people are used and may not even be aware of it," (Jenkinson, p. 35), those of us who count other elements in The Catcher in the Rye need to point up the significance of those alleged profanities.

In the first place, anyone who reads Catcher will note immediately that seventeen-year-old Holden Caulfield has a propensity for hyperbole. Whether Holden is referring to all the things that "killed" him, the "thousand hints" he provides a classmate, the three cartons of cigarettes he says he smoked in a day, or the age of an older woman in the office of Phoebe's school (he says she must have been 100-years-old), Holden stretches reality beyond its limits. Probably every reader who is high school age or older will recognize the exaggerations as marks of Holden's immaturity.

Likewise, the frequent use of expletives is also an indication of Holden's childishness. The oft-used "goddams" and "Chrissakes" are an affectation, and teenagers who read the book recognize them immediately for what they are. They see the use of those words as a flaw in Holden's character; and like the blonde on the Lavender Room dance floor and Holden's sister Phoebe, they too would ask him to stop swearing. Quite rightly, teenagers think of Holden as too good a person to employ such language. At the same time, though, they recognize that the overuse of certain words (whether they be swear words or the word boy that Holden himself singles out) is a sign of a weak vocabulary. And if no other reason were to be given for high school students to read the book, that one alone which emphasizes the importance of a strong vocabulary would be substantial justification. Holden is an object lesson for all of us who would employ expletives as adjectives and all-inclusive tags like "and all" and "all that stuff."

General semanticists, of course, would have a field day examining Holden's misuse of language; and if students were provided a few lessons from Hayakawa's Language in Thought and Action or Wendell Johnson's People in Quandaries, they too would observe Holden Caulfield's violations of semantic principles. As a consequence of their exploration into Holden's mishandling of language, they would probably be more careful in their own use of words. For instance, because Holden apparently ends up in a mental institution, they might recognize that Holden's absorption with "phonies" everywhere is a sign of mental illness. Furthermore, with a bit of study they might also recognize the devastating effect that Holden's attitude of allness has on him.

Thus, by readingThe Catcher in the Rye, students might modify their own all-encompassing statements, avoiding expressions like the following from Holden:

> Pency was full of crooks.
> I was surrounded by phonies.
> Then we shook hands. And all that crap.
> Grand. There's a word I really hate. It's a phony. I could puke every time I hear it.
> Mothers are all slightly insane.
> I hate it when somebody has cheap suitcases.
> I don't get hardly anything out of anything.
> I'm in bad shape. I'm in lousy shape.

Truly, Holden is in "bad shape" because he hasn't learned moderation. Holden is either knocking himself out (or killing himself), or he is attempting to be very serious. He wants to marry the girl he's with, or he hates the girl. He either likes something a lot, or he doesn't like it at all. And when he interprets what another individual does as "perverty" (as in the case of Mr. Antolini, when the former teacher pats his head while Holden is sleeping), Holden completely turns away—or runs away—from the offending person.

Holden's perspective is obviously two-dimensional. Thus, he can see himself either as successful or as a failure, as sexy or impotent, as intelligent or stupid, as nervous or depressed. He views the rest of the world in essentially the same way. His comment about life not being a game serves as an illustration: "Some game," he says. "If you get on the side where all the hot-shots are, then it's a game, all right—I'll admit that. But if you get on the other side, where there aren't any hot-shots, then what's a game about it? Nothing." Too frequently, Holden sees himself on this other side.

Yet, despite the negative qualities that are manifested in Holden, readers generally respond favorably to him. We recognize and appreciate the extremely strong bond he has with his younger sister. We sense Holden's complete attachment to his deceased brother, Allie, and we comprehend how Holden could be crazed by Allie's death. (Indeed, if we are empathetic, we may even recognize another implication to the story: We may see ourselves as Holden, recognizing that there but for the grace of God would be we.)

Certainly, we realize that Holden has an obvious love for children and wants to do things for them, such as when he helps the little girl at the skating rink with her skates or accompanies the two young brothers to the mummies in the museum. And, of course, everyone should see that Holden himself considers fuck as a dirty word, for when he finds it on the stairway wall at school, he rubs it off. He doesn't want Phoebe "and all the other little kids" to see it and wonder what it means and then have some "dirty kid" tell them.

Yes, Holden shows a readiness to serve children—just as he has fantacized. To Phoebe he clearly explains what he'd like to do:

> Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around—nobody big, I mean—except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff—I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all.

Unfortunately, though, Holden can't even save himself, and perhaps that too is one of the reasons we who defend The Catcher in the Rye will stand up for the book. We see Holden as a crazy, mixed-up kid who has high goals for himself but because of the circumstances is overwhelmed by them. We see him as a flighty teenager who has suffered from the shocks of the world, a kid who one minute will put on an act of bravado and shout to make a point and in the next minute will lower his voice to a whisper. We see a kid who, when troubled, will bawl like a baby, but in his fantasy world can imagine himself bravely facing the world with a bullet in his guts. We can laugh at his self-deception when he says such things as "I didn't cut any classes," and in the next breath says "There were a couple of them I didn't attend once in awhile...but I didn't cut any." And maybe we can even spot ourselves when this hypersensitive youth talks about certain phonies.

If Mr. Antolini is the truth-sayer of the story (and there are strong grounds for thinking he is, though he appears to betray Holden when he pets him), his words provide a strong basis for reading The Catcher in the Rye. Talking to Holden (and to us as readers), he says:

> Many, many men have been just as troubled morally and spiritually as you are right now. Happily, some of them kept records of their troubles. You'll learn from them—if you want to. Just as someday, if you have something to offer, someone will learn something from you.

The Catcher in the Rye is Holden's record of his troubles. Those who want to learn from the book will find there is much to be learned. But our learning will depend on what things we count and our reasons for counting them.

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"Dare We Disturb . . . ?"
A Defense of Robert Cormier's Novels

The censorship of Robert Cormier's novels shares some similarities with the censorship of other books for young people, but in some important respects it is quite different from most. When censorship occurs, it is the censors who define the ground rules—the basis for censorship. Their approach in nearly all cases forces the defenders of reading freedom to arguments based upon false premises. That is, the censors object to words or scenes that are isolated from their contexts rather than assessing their appropriateness as a part of an artistic unit.

We who support the freedom to read understand instinctively the need for this more comprehensive perspective. Those who assault this freedom either lack the intellectual ability to grasp the broader view or else choose to ignore it in order to further their cause of restricting reading material. To be sure, the censors are descended from the Puritans who persecuted Roger Williams for his advocacy of complete religious freedom as a right of the people. The only freedom wanted by the censors, like the Puritans, is the freedom to impose their own limited views on the whole of society. Such general issues must be confronted, exposing the shallowness of the enemies of freedom, but the individual cases must be fought, too.

That Robert Cormier's novels should need defending is ironic, considering the quality of his writing, the nature of the man himself, and the thematic content of his novels. A consideration of these factors provides an individualized basis for rebuffing the censorship his work has suffered.

LITERARY QUALITY

Whether we separately consider The Chocolate War, I Am the Cheese, After the First Death, or The Bumblebee Flies Anyway, or treat this body of literature as a whole, one must be impressed with the substantial quality of the writing. Especially impressive has been the consistency of Cormier's high level of quality. It is this high quality that makes censorship directed at his novels both more ironic and more disturbing. The fact that someone of such artistic integrity has his works censored makes eminently clear the fallaciousness of the censors' position.

Literary quality is a thin defense against censorship, as history has shown. Everything from the Bible and Shakespeare's plays to The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Our Town have been subject to attack. Again, it is clear that censors either know nothing of literary quality or care nothing for it.

Still, it is better to be called to defend good writing than poor. Since the assessment of quality is a function of the observer, there may not be universal critical acclaim for any work of literature, yet the cumulative acclaim given by recognized critics is strong ammunition. The censors are no longer dealing with isolated individuals in a community; they are having to oppose those who have impressive credentials.

Consider this sampling of support for Cormier's novels: The New York Times cited I Am the Cheese as "An Outstanding Book of the Year," and School Library Journal called it "Best Book of the Year." The New York Times called The Chocolate War "masterfully structured and rich in theme," while saying of After the First Death, "A marvelously told story. . .more than sustains the reputation its author has won. . .; it adds luster to it." Speaking of After the First Death, Harrison Salisbury said,

> I haven't read so painful, so touching, so tragic, so sensitive a book. . .since I can remember. It hurts and aches, and burns inside your brain like a little piece of radioactive cobalt. . .

The Alan Review had this to say of The Bumblebee Flies Anyway, his latest novel:

> . . .consistent with his other successes. . .this master has given us a carefully-crafted, inspiring novel that gives the reader a feel for the struggle between these two forces, the individual and a dehumanizing institution.

Few writers have inspired more positive critical acclaim in recent years, as evidenced by the number of articles and published interviews focused on this man and his work. For example, Cormier was an unquestioned part of Ken Donelson's listing in Media and Methods of outstanding books from recent years. Also, in her Alan Review (Spring, 1980) article, "The Poetry of Naming in Young Adult Books," Alleen Nilsen wrote:

> I chose. . .Robert Cormier because of the craftsmanship shown in his. . .books. . . Cormier is one of a relatively small number of contemporary authors for young readers who makes use of the full range of techniques available to skilled literary artists.

Quite literally, Robert Cormier is a "textbook example" of literary excellence. In their textbook Literature for Today's Young Adults, Donelson and Nilsen wrote, "The book that we have chosen as an example of the best of modern realism for young adults is Robert Cormier's The Chocolate War."

PERSONAL INTEGRITY

Robert Cormier would be one of the last people I would want to attack as a corruptor of morals. Choosing to do so only reveals another area of ignorance, for Cormier as a person embodies a kind of Normal Rockwellian bit of Americana. Here is a quiet and gentle family man, who lives in the same small New England town where he lived as a boy. It is there that he worked many years as a newspaperman. Now, when not at his typewriter, he can be found down at the fire hall passing time with old school chums or at the local theater taking in the latest film.

There is nothing about this man that can be associated with a Larry Flint. His manner is so benign that people often ask, "Are you really the man who wrote those powerful books?" Powerful though his works may be, they are not an irresponsible unleashing of language and action. As a courtesy to his readers, he has given working drafts to his teenaged daughter for reaction. What more care can a person exercise than not to put forth anything for someone else's children that he would not share with his own. That's integrity.

This information about Robert Cormier is personal and laden with emotional impact. Since logic is not necessarily effective against detractors, other means may be used, and what better position could we have. Attacking Cormier puts a person in the position of attacking widely accepted basic values in American life. What censor wants to be so recognized.

THEMATIC CONTENT

It is in his themes that Cormier's strongest defense may be found, for he speaks eloquently in behalf of individual rights. His four novels for adolescents consistently have focused on the struggle between individuals and dehumanizing institutions. His protagonists do not succumb easily—or necessarily. They are the embodiment of classic heroism in their struggles, and it is the immediacy and reality of their portrayal that makes these novels so powerful.

In The Chocolate War the institution is a combination of church and the educational establishment, and Jerry Renault challenges their corruption as he dares to disturb the universe of Brother Leon, Archie, and the others. In I Am the Cheese Adam Farmer struggles for psychological survival in a world controlled by a combination of the national government and a psycho-medical institution. When a military/political combination displays wanton diesregard for individuals, Kate Forester of After the First Death reaches for new strengths, not only for her own survival but for that of the children for whom she feels responsible. Barney Snow and his friends in The Bumblebee Flies Anyway fight to gain individual control of individual destinies within yet another arena, the medical establishment, as it dabbles with individuals chemically and psychologically.

Consistently, the central theme has been this struggle between individuals and institutions. In each instance the institution holds overall control of the arena within which the characters move. It sets the boundaries, both physical and psychological, and most of the people are behaving in acceptable patterns—acceptable to the institutions because the patterns do not disturb the universe. But Cormier, again in each instance, focuses our attention on individuals. In doing so he causes us to see through these individuals that the boundaries and the controls need not be passively accepted. They can be challenged; indeed, they must be challenged.

Jerry Renault clearly bucked the system in The Chocolate War by making decisions for himself so that he could gain control of his life. He was courageous in facing the overwhelming forces marshaled by Brother Leon, Assistant Headmaster of Trinity, the parochial school setting for the novel, and by Archie Costello, leader of The Vigils, the secret student society. As a teacher Brother Leon was smirking and sarcastic, probing for student weaknesses so that he could exploit them, making fools of students in front of others. Behind the scenes he blackmailed students to do his bidding, threatening to deprive them of whatever they most prized, David Caroni his grades, or Archie his power through the Vigils. Even as a staged beating took place, Brother Leon stood watching from the shadows, clearly in command. At the end he said to Archie, "You really didn't use your best judgment tonight, Archie. But I realize you did it for the school. For Trinity."

Jerry did not set out to be rebellious, but The Vigils, through an assignment made by Archie, forced him to refuse to sell chocolates for Trinity. It was after that that he suffered cheap shots on the football field, threatening telephone calls, a beating by a gang, the silent treatment by the student body, and finally the brutal beating on stage before the student body. This concerted assault on an individual was engineered by The Vigils with the tacit support of Brother Leon, who exalted "school spirit" over an individual.

In I Am the Cheese Adam Farmer was constantly trying to gain some understanding of his life so that he might have some control of it. He, together with his mother and father, had been given a new identity by the government as protection after his father had given testimony for the government. Mr. Grey, their sole contact with the government and their former lives, constantly probed Adam's father for additional information the government might use. In so doing, he became more of an adversary than a protector. After his parents died in an automobile wreck that had a questionable cause, Adam lived in an institution, "a private sanitarium maybe," apparently operated either by or in collusion with the government.

There Adam was constantly drugged, keeping him pliant. Just as Mr. Grey probed his father, so a man named Brint, posing as a confidant to Adam, cooly conducted taped counseling sessions with him to ferret out information from his memory. Ostensibly certain information that might be in Adam's memory was of value to the government. If this information was buried in his subconscious or even if he never knew it in the first place, he simply might be holding back. Either way he was not to be trusted. Thus he was an individual doomed for the supposed good of the institution—the government. In his mind he was courageously travelling beyond the constraining boundaries of his institution, and in reality he was fighting to grasp the reality that he only glimpsed.

Like Cormier's other teenaged protagonists, Kate Forester, of After the First Death, through no conscious decision or fault of her own, was thrust unwittingly into a situation that challenged individual dignity. She simply happened to be a substitute bus driver on the day that a group of terrorists commandeered the bus and took its riders hostage. She did not set out to rebel or to be heroic: rather she found herself in a position where she discovered strength heretofore unknown to her. Kate relentlessly schemed against her captors and took actions whenever possible.

She and the children on the bus were mere pawns to be sacrificed by either the terrorists or their own country's forces, represented most notably by General Marchand. In his unquestioned commitment to the government's Project Delta, the General manipulated and ultimately personally sacrificed his son Ben, once more demonstrating the supremacy of an institution over an individual.

Barney Snow and his fellow patients, including Mazzo, Allie Roon, and Billy the Kidney, in The Bumblebee Flies Anyway did not choose to be ill, of course. Yet here they were incarcerated in a kind of experimental hospital in great need of help. There they were treated as guinea pigs, being given unknown drugs by the one known as the Handyman, who with Bascam enforced the institutional rules. The routine set for them was absolutely dehumanizing. They were not to develop close ties with other patients, not to discuss the realities of their conditions, not to know what treatments they were receiving. In spite of these conditions, Barney undertook a surreptitious project to cross the imposed boundaries. In defying institutional rules, he discovered much about himself, about being an individual human being with personal dignity.

It is through these characters that Cormier explores the boundaries of human spirit together with the possibilities within these boundaries. Not one of them is concerned with the usual topics of contemporary realistic adolescent fiction—alcoholism, drug use (except where imposed by institutions), premarital sex, childbirth, physical handicaps, divorce, mental illness (except where imposed by institutions), and homosexuality. Cormier's focus has not been on menstruation, rape, or prostitution. His characters stepped boldly and independently into the world of adolescent literature where most characters finally got their first bra, or reached a decision about having intercourse, or chose to have an abortion or a baby, or kicked a drug habit, or adjusted to a single-parent home. While surely Jerry, Adam, Kate, and Barney must somewhere in their lives have had to confront similar concerns, it took the good sense of their creator to have a larger view to see much greater problems that young people should face.

One of the major issues confronting humanity today is the survival of freedom and individual human rights in the face of the ubiquitous threat posed by a variety of establishments which permeate and control our lives, ever subduing rather than preserving individual freedom. Cormier has given us carefully-crafted, inspiring novels that give readers a feel for the struggle between these two forces, the individual and dehumanizing institutions, which are ostensibly good but have an insiduous nature. School, church, hospital, government—surely these are people-serving, individual-enhancing institutions. Look more closely, as Cormier guides us, for unsettling views are waiting.

Such a negative portrayal of established institutions is bound to be unpopular in some circles and will make some individuals uncomfortable, especially when they themselves are a part of and subject to such an institution. Specifically, many teachers feel that they dare not disturb the universe, and as Cormier has made perfectly clear, there is danger in doing so.

It is no more difficult to understand why a teacher would choose not to assign a Cormier novel to a class than it is to understand why Jerry Renault would choose to go along with the crowd. But the question remains for the thoughtful individual: What kind of success do I want? And that is certainly a worthy question for young people to consider.

There is great irony in Cormier's novels being censored by people who revel in memories of America's 19th century rugged individualism. Their censorship drives are a direct assault on rights of individuals, and it is these rights of individuals against dehumanizing institutions that Cormier champions in his novels.

NOTE: This article is based in part on both a guest lecture delivered at Miami University, Oxford, OH, October 8, 1983, and an article prepared for The Alan Review.

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The Debate in Literary Consciousness: Dickey's *Deliverance*

Deliverance was published by Houghton Mifflin Company in 1970 after James Dickey's rise to national visibility as a major poet. He had, since his first book of poetry, *Into The Stone*, (1957) won every major national award of recognition for his poetry; he had been appointed to the post of Consultant of Poetry at the Library of Congress; he was being paired with Robert Lowell in the minds of several critics as a leading contemporary poet.

Understandably then, public anticipation of the novel was keen; the novel was deservedly popular, as was the movie made from it, with a bit part as a sheriff for Dickey, who was also a worker on the script. Professional book reviewers greeted it with a range of critical responses; the *Christian Science Monitor* sniffed about its machoism;[1] others worried about its moral confusion and looseness. However, L.E. Sissman, a fellow poet and then a regular book reviewer for the *New Yorker* magazine, said it "...ranks high, indeed,..." among other classics of male adventure and praised its workmanlike prose style.[2] It is fair to say, I think, that *Deliverance* added no more to Dickey's reputation as writer than Allen Tate's novel The Fathers added to his. But after its acquisition by public libraries and schools, the novel then gained notoriety as it came to the attention of the censors who in typical cases in Maryland and Virginia found it "obscene."

This obscenity charge I mean to treat as one of the central concerns of this paper, and I shall examine the alleged principal offending passage in the context of what it seems to me Dickey was trying to do. I intend not only to review the structure of the novel, but equally important, to place this book in the wider context of American literature and life.

Deliverance was written by a man with a hearty appetite for public life as a college athlete, fighter-pilot, successful businessman in advertising, woodman, archer, and guitarist. The novel, like his poems, uses these avocations; it's about four urban, middle-aged men canoeing for three days down the wild Cahulawasee River, encountering a reality utterly different from their comfortable, middle-class lives left a world behind. However, readers of the novel and viewers of the movie ought to be cautious about accepting this view of Dickey the man as given to them on the dust jacket of his books and about accepting the surface adventures of the novel as the latest adventures of grown-up Huckleberry Finns.

What is crucial to an understanding of *Deliverance* is that Dickey's vocation is that of a poet's, an educated and responsive observer standing amidst humanity and nature, combining the alert passivity of the hunter with an athletic intelligence that takes outrageous chances in its wish to find reality behind appearances. Dickey seems amused but properly unapologetic about the surfaces of his life which most publishers think the reading public will find incongruous with a life devoted to poetry. But beyond his formal, excellent education in traditional literature, Dickey also reveals himself to be an imaginative and voracious reader, a student of techniques used by other men at other times, now adaptable to his own examination of reality. Melville and Conrad haunt the pages of *Deliverance*: (one remembers that Melville too received condescension from professional reviewers who were amazed to find a common sailor who wrote novels.)

What is *Deliverance* "about"? Like all good novels worth multiple readings, it's about many things, but principally it's about survival of the body through a terrible ordeal and the deliverance back into everyday society after terrible knowledge. Many of the concerns, images, and fields of interest found in Dickey's poetry continue in *Deliverance*. There is the fascination with cover of costume and nakedness, meanness and decency, sexuality, the glory and non-humanness of nature, the surprising mysteries at the heart of everyday life.

The novel[3] has five divisions: September 14th, 15th, and 16th are each a chapter, with a "Before" and "After." The "Before" section opens with a *map*, an intellectual paper symbol of the wild territory the four men will experience; the remainder of this chapter gives us a sense of the "everydayness" of the narrator, Ed Gantry, emphasizing the comfortable, relaxed circumstances of his life. We also sense his suspicion of theorizing, his self-satisfaction, and his vague discontent with that satisfaction. The other three characters are rather flatly characterized: Lewis Medlock—outdoorsman, archer, bodybuilder, rash leader of the expedition; Drew Ballinger—methodical, thoughtful, guitarist; and Bobby Trippe, a social acquaintance who is inexperienced or incompetent outside a country club setting. The three days of the 14th, 15th, and 16th are spent on the wild river and are the heart of the novel.

From the city of vague discontent, the four men drive to the river, through the country, Nature. "There was a motel, then a weedfield..." "The change was not gradual." (p. 38) The blue mountains of southern Appalachia loom and take them in, and at last standing on a bank and looking through a "ragged, ashen window" of willows pulled aside, the four men see the river for the first time:

> It was gray-green, very clear and yet with a certain milkiness, too; it looked as though it would turn white and foam at rocks more easily than other water. It was about forty yards wide, and shallow, about two and a half or three feet deep. The bed was full of clean brown pebbles. (p. 70)

I am quoting here to show how matter of fact Dickey is about nature, and how absent the reader feels it to be of Wordsworthian or moral impulses or sermons. Here, it is energy in serene form; later we will see its amoral, irresistible destructiveness.

The beginning of the ordeal occurs on the 15th, the second day. Bobby Trippe, the pleasantly social, weakest member of the quartet is sodomized at shotgun point by one of a pair of hill people, ominous and half-sick and resembling Pap in Huckleberry Finn. The narrator is in danger of being sexually violated next and under threats of castration, when an arrow from Lewis' bow kills his tormentor and frightens away the other hill man. Ed's sexual honor has been saved, Bobby's lost forever, but the serious problem of murder must now be faced.

Let us freeze the frame here, in the heart of American darkness, at this moment of human horror. For the purposes of this paper, we must primarily focus on the charges of obscenity found in this scene. What does it mean in the context of what the novel is about? In the novel's careful examination of nature and the natural we have here one example of the influence of nature on man, since these two men from the hills have been associated with the "natural" and are deliberately seen as "other," as untouched by the artificiality of the city. This side of nature is perverse, literally, illustrating the darkest side of that freedom to follow the heart's desire that is found here in the hills outside the law, or better or more accurately, where everyone is a "deputy sheriff," a law unto himself. We are outside some imagined boundaries of ourselves, where there is a freedom where anything can happen, as on Twain's Mississippi or Joseph Conrad's Congo. The civic man also kills there, in self defense, but kills nonetheless and must come to grips with the deed, unimaginable several days ago. Other horrible things are to follow: Drew, praised as "the best of us all," is killed by the surviving mountain man shooting from the heights of a gorge, and Lewis who has developed his magnificent body as a "mystique" has his body broken at the falls of the gorge; Ed Gantry, a man of some prideful modesty, taking charge of the expedition, must make plans for the deadliest hunt of all—the beast being the other hill man who is, in the minds of the survivors, planning to kill them all, picking them off one by one as they sit helplessly in their canoes below. And the next day, Ed, using his developed skills as an archer and hunter, kills another man and disposes of the body, before he brings Bobby's humiliated body, Lew's broken body, and his wounded body back to the law, the hospital, and civilization in the next town down river. What began as men's play as seen on a map ended in a confused and bloody, immoral struggle for survival. Can there be any doubt that Dickey has no romantic illusions about nature or about the beneficent influences of nature on man in a state of natural freedom? One of the points the novel makes is that the reality of nature is beautiful, yes, even "glorious" as the narrator says, immortal as the gods, yes, but it is not beneficent and not of itself productive of the traditional human values of obedience to law, mutual cooperation among citizens, knowledge, or art.

I have said that Dickey for all his reputation as a man of action and his anti-academicism is a thoughtful, well-educated, well-read man. He is quite aware of the position of Nature in much of American letters and thought. To the readers of this essay, I need only remind us of optimistic assumptions about Nature and the Natural Man that run through our literature from Crevecour through Emerson to Ansel Adams or the newest member of the Sierra Club. There have also been rebuttals from such as Michael Wigglesworth who wrote about the forests in 1662:

> A waster and howling wilderness
> Where none inhabited
> But hellish fiends, and brutish men...
>
> (from "God's Controversy with New England")

through Hawthorne and Melville down to, say, Robert Penn Warren. The same division of opinion can be seen in the regional literature of the old Southwest and the modern South of Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty. This literary and cultural quarrel needs a clarifying discussion from any teacher of this book.

The survival of the body, however broken, is through skill, luck, and grit; the problem of the return to civility, of deliverance to "another life" is handled ambiguously. Consider what the narrator has done: secretly helped bury the body of the mountain man whom Lewis has killed, turned contemptuously on his friend, Bobby, for having submitted to sodomization at shotgun point, weighed down Drew's body with rocks before hiding it in the depths of the river, deliberately stalked and killed another hill man and sunk his body in the depths of the river, and lied repeatedly and creatively to the law, whose investigation he wishes to avoid. The "After" section shows a man who tells Drew's widow that "he's sorry" in the bluntest way, and who has a "special" "small fear" of being discovered, and whose life seems relatively unchanged. The new Lake Cahula formed from the dam slowly covers the wild river and the novel ends.

"Going back was easy and pleasant, though I was driving a dead man's car, and everything in it reminded me of him." (p. 267) The objection to this novel on the part of the censors who found the sodomization obscene might well be shifted to this untroubled "deliverance" back into the everydayness of ordinary society. Here, the teacher ought to raise questions and ask for a careful reading and questioning on the part of the students. After a struggle for survival, when one man kills another, premeditatedly, does one just come home quietly? Is that what Dickey is saying about what survivors do? Are we to see Ed Gantry as callous? as numbed? Do we see any change in this modern descendent of Ishmael and Huckleberry Finn? It is a very strange deliverance that certainly needs careful examination.

[1] Pamela Marsch, Christian Science Monitor, p. 7, April 2, 1970.

[2] L.E. Sissman, New Yorker, p. 123, May 2, 1970.

[3] I have used the first edition of Deliverance (Houghton-Mifflin: New York) 1970 as my text. A useful collection of critical essays writen about Dickey shortly after Deliverance was published is James Dickey: The Expansive Imagination (Everett Edwards, Inc.: Deland, Florida) 1973, edited by Richard J. Calhoun.

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"Messing up the minds of the citizenry en route"
Essential Questions of Value: The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test

The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test is Tom Wolfe's 1968 "new journalism" report on novelist Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters and their central role in the birth and development of the psychedelic scene: the drug culture, the hippie/freak phenomenon.

The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test: drugs, rock n' roll, promiscuous sex, wild irresponsible living, even the Hell's Angels glorified as heroes. Why would you ever even want to read a book like that, bub, much less expose innocent kids to it? Look at that title. It's all right there—you don't have to read any more than those five title words to see that it sums up all that's wrong with contemporary American society. Look at it word by word. "Electric"—as in the power that makes rock n' roll possible, the power that turned music (the gift of rhythm and melody and harmony) into a brutal, high-velocity, eardrum-destroying, frenzy-creating immorality. "Electricity"—the power source that turned this God-fearing, industrious society into a lazy nation of TV-addicted, convenience food-munching, acid rain-producing brownouts. Sure, Electricity has its benefits, but historically it has to be named, along with the gasoline engine, as the primary cause for the loss of muscle and guts and hard-working industry in American society. Electricity—it leads directly to "Kool-Aid": a prime symbol of the contemporary experience of youth and maturation in this country: empty, artificial sweetness rather than what it always used to be, a period for learning responsibilities and skills. And "Acid Test"? There's a real, gut-wrenching irony. Not the acid test we used to know—the initiation into adult society, the crucial deed that determined whether you had absorbed the lessons of youth; the test of one's mettle. No, sir. They're talking about lysergic acid diethylamide: LSD. L S D. The "test" is not whether you've learned your lessons and can apply them when the chips are down; the test is whether you can forget what little of the crumbling culture you have absorbed and be more flipped-out and weird than the next guy. It's a good title, all right: sums up the whole 416-page mess—tells it all in five words. Enough read. Enough said.

Almost. One effect of reading Tom Wolfe's The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test is that it loosens up your prose style, making you free to experiment with the language. When you've been reading Wolfe for a while, you can hardly prevent aspects of his style from seeping into yours and spreading, like a dye in water (my second paragraph is evidence of the phenomenon). Most of the college freshmen I teach composition to need to loosen up—to become what Francis Christensen calls "acrobats of the sentence." But frequently, as a result of little practice in writing or because they have been victims of the error-correction approach to teaching writing, their strategy is to write as simply as possible, thereby (as they see it) making the least number of mistakes; and making no mistakes is what they believe good writing to be all about. Tom Wolfe is a good antidote to that mistaken concept. He's full of exciting experiments with language; The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test can give a much more interesting approach to language study than the Harbrace handbook.

But, depending upon your orientation and assignment as a teacher, the study of Tom Wolfe's style may not be the most important reason for adopting the Acid Test as a text for study. Though, of course, style—real, meaningful, interesting style—is never devoid of interesting, meaningful content. And, without a doubt, Wolfe's 416 pages of electric prose and kool-aid poetry are full of events and ideas and characters that contemporary youth need to discuss and understand. In addition to presenting an opportunity for studying the American language, the Acid Test presents the possibility for deep, searching discussions of American society and culture.

In fact, if I were asked to justify teaching the book in a single sentence, I'd say that it presents, for teenagers—through subject matter they can "relate to"—three broad and important subjects for study and discussion: 1) the American approach to the English language, complete with a wide number of literary/rhetorical devices and techniques, 2) a historical/sociological study of the birth and development of the "Counter Culture" (the drug culture, the hippie/freak phenomenon, the world of Rock, the psychedelic movement—whatever you want to call it, each name emphasizing a different aspect of the now wide-spread and diversified life style), and 3) an evaluation of the values associated with the drug culture and with the values of contemporary American culture in general—indeed, with values in the widest sense: as they exist in not only Western but also Oriental cultures.

Now that's a long sentence, my just-completed "single sentence justifying teaching the book" (145 words, to be exact; and you must judge with what grace, how "acrobatically," my thought moved through it). And I didn't learn to write long sentences like that by studying Tom Wolfe. Rather, I learned how (and why) primarily from Francis Christensen, Donald Daiker, and Linda Flower—fascinating rhetoric theorists and researchers. At least—they are fascinating and cogent to me. But theorists, even when they are also good teachers, are not necessarily fascinating to students. I know; I've tried to teach writing by using the excellent books from those three (Christensen's The New Rhetoric, Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg's The Writer's Options, Flower's Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing). The students can be just as turned off to those fine texts as to any other. To teach writing well (to teach anything well?) this simple fact is primary: one must first engage the students' minds—not only their intellects but also their emotions, their imaginations. That means starting with subjects and modes of expression familiar and important to them.

The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test presents exactly that. Whether or not individual students are directly involved with drugs or listen to rock 'n roll (are there really some who don't?) or experiment with unconventional behavior, those elements are never far from their lives. You can bet that some (if not many) of their peers are up to their ears in all three: all youth must somehow, come to terms with the widely varied forces and opportunities of our affluent, permissive society. Thus the students' strong need to understand common problematic behaviors (drug use and promiscuous sex, for example) plus the strong interest in the art forms Wolfe writes about (rock music, light shows, body decoration, Kesey's novels—or, at least, the movies made from them) provide a double barb—a hook which can be strongly set, allowing the teacher to reel in. . .well, not so much the students, but ideas, feelings, other art forms: the cultural heritage which the Counter Culture (however much it wishes to see itself as a substitute or alternative) is a branch of. What education must do, these days, is to help students see that the world is not as fragmented as they might think—that the music and art forms and life styles which they may be drawn to (or repelled by) do, indeed, have their roots in the wider culture and can best be understood if one knows the context in which they arose. Thus, Ken Kesey, the central character of the Acid Test—though only a few years ago a superstar, pop-culture hero—is now ancient history to teenagers; but the films made from Kesey's novels (One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and Sometimes a Great Notion) are an art form which will immediately engage students (why not show the films while reading the book?), simultaneously accomplishing two results: making the character (and the book) come alive and launching the class into the kind of discussion necessary to understand literature. For narrative structure, character, and theme are the same in films as they are in novels.

Wolfe himself pulls some interesting and complex narrative time shifts which will require some careful analysis to follow—the central one being the circular movement of the book. Starting with Wolfe's appearance in San Francisco just before the "Acid Test Graduation" (the trips festival at which Kesey, by then an outlaw, busted several times for possession of drugs, will supposedly announce that it is time to go beyond acid, beyond LSD), the book ends with a description of the Graduation: the Graduation is the final culmination of both the Merry Prankster experiment and The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test itself ("The Graduation" is the name of the final chapter before the two-page "Epilogue"). Through the first three chapters we are in more or less straight narrative time, with Wolfe as a prominently involved first-person narrator. Then at the beginning of Chapter 4, the narrator slips away and we start the story of Kesey's life, beginning when he was a graduate student in creative writing at Stanford University—just before he begins to experiment (as a paid volunteer in psychological studies) with drugs. Three hundred and forty-three pages later, Wolfe as narrator reappears in the same Haight-Ashbury garage we left him in during Chapter 4, and the original narrative report resumes, the audience immensely richer in understanding of the background that has led up to the Graduation. This is, of course, essentially novelistic technique which Wolfe has brought into journalistic reporting—just one of the many sophisticated literary devices Wolfe employs (begging to be explored with students?).

Or if one wanted to explore poetry with students, why not start with the poetry of the Grateful Dead, the Merry Pranksters' favorite band? One is certain to catch student interest by bringing in an album to play. And it could prove interesting to contrast the poetic technique of Robert Hunter (the Dead's main lyricist) with the technique of Tom Wolfe. Here is "Attics of My Life" from the American Beauty album:

In the attics of my life,
full of cloudy dreams unreal.
Full of tastes no tongue can know
and lights no eye can see.
When there was no ear to hear,
You sang to me.

I have spent my life
seeking all that's still unsung.
Bent my ear to hear the tune
and closed my eyes to see.
When there were no strings to play,
you played to me.

In the secret space of dreams
where I, dreaming, lay amazed.
When the secrets all are told
and the petals all unfold.
When there was no dream of mine,
you dreamed of me.

In the book of love's own dream
where all the print is blood,
where all the pages are my days
and all my lights grow old.

When I had no wings to fly,
you flew to me,
you flew to me.

If Hunter leans heavily on paradox and imagery and repetition, what is Wolfe doing in these lines?

Singing Jimmy,
Hocking hoarse and phlegmy
Sticks his grizzle
In the dust-muck Brownsville drizzle,
Starts to thumbing
Up the Texas belly bumming,
Heeee! the cops and robbers game.

Lone superhero,
Superhighway Cosmo hero,
Never lies.
Honesty's the best disguise
In the cops and robbers game.

See, cop fellas?
Freaked-out head-buff Cercosporellas
Here's my Rat-tar
And my buckskin cowboy suit.
Prankster red boots
From Guadalajara.
My cowboy hat
Shows you where I'm at
In the cops and robbers game.
(p. 348-8)

And what is poetry doing in journalism?

But even more fun than analysis for students is imitation. One can ask them to write a general, free imitation of Wolfe's style, or one can pick out specific elements to imitate. Can they write a phrase like this one of Wolfe's: "the incredible postwar American electro-pastel surge into the suburbs?" or like this even more extreme example of the same technique: ". . .the sort of outing on which the Angels did their thing, their whole freaking thing, *en* mangy raunchy head-breaking fire-pissing rough-godamn-housing *masse*." Such imitation exercises can lead into discussions of ideas about prose styles and syntactic structures: in these two examples Wolfe is playing with the bound modifier in contrast to the contemporary trend to let the free modifier carry the descriptive load. (Here is the context for bringing in both Christensen and Daiker.) There are many other hallmarks of Wolfe's style which might be first imitated, then analyzed: the extended series, the abrupt adoption of the persona being described, the leitmotif which frequently interrupts, the repetition, the slang, the mixture on tones—it's a heady rich zingy world, this Tom Wolfe prose. There is, whatever you choose to work with, much imaginative use of language associated with the Acid Test: Wolfe's and Kesey's, primarily, though some students may wish to pursue other writers who figure in the book (Robert Hunter, Hugh Romney, Norman Hartweg, Paul Krassner, Stewart Brand, Larry McMurtry, Hunter Thompson). Some students will already be familiar with the Grateful Dead lyrics or the Kesey books.

But few of them will know the history behind the events, or will have thought about what cultural forces made the events possible or how the situations have developed and changed. Do they know the connection between Cassady and Kerouac? Between Stewart Brand and The Whole Earth Catalog, The Co-Evolution Quarterly? Do they know who Timothy Leary is or what happened to him? Allen Ginsberg? Do they know what Kesey is doing now? What was the final result of the Prankster experiment? Do they know who the beatniks were and how they are related to hippies? What happened to the hippies scene and what its primary events were?

Following, or as part of this historical exploration, one might wish to seek, with students, the evolution of values in this country from the Puritans to the Pranksters. Or one might simply use the book as a springboard for writing and talking about values—values which most students are muddling through every day of their lives. Major questions are raised by The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test. Indeed, the very raison d'etre of Kesey and the Pranksters seems to have been to question and experiment with basic values the dominant culture takes for granted. Maybe those values should be rejected; maybe they should be revered; but most important is that they should be understood. Let me just list a few of the major value problems the book raises:

- What is the purpose of existence—to work? to play?

- How important or necessary are Laws? (Why do we so admire outlaws?)
- What is a hero and why do we need heroes? (Who are the contemporary heroes and what values do they embody?)
- How much freedom does one actually have in choosing a lifestyle?
- What are mental states? What is the value of altering them? How many ways are there to alter mental states? Has there been intelligent research into altering mental states (intelligent research as opposed to thoughtless daring-do)? Who are the researchers?
- How are social relationships structured by shared assumptions about the following:
  - sex?
  - communal living vs. nuclear families?
  - raising children?
  - co-existing with neighbors?
  - group decision making? (leadership? goal setting?)
  - relationship to authority

These are important questions to be asked and faced honestly. And if students at your school are experimenting with drugs, I can think of no better book for initiating a discussion of the values and problems inherent in using drugs. For while Kesey and the Pranksters advocate drugs and use them a great deal, the book neither glorifies them nor condemns them (which many students wll find refreshing, given some of the heavy-handed anti-drug propaganda). Cassady uses speed to rush himself to the very limits between perception and reality. But Stark Naked, apparently freed of all societal restrictions, is unable to handle it and goes—never to return—stark raving mad (a bitterly ironic result of following one of the most cherished Prankster ideals: "going with the flow"). Even the Grateful Dead—the lead band of the Trips Festivals, the inventors of acid rock—do not overlook the negative side of drug use:

> What in the world ever became of sweet Jane?
> She lost her sparkle you know she isn't the same.
> Livin' on reds, vitamin C and cocaine,
> all a friend can say is ain't it a shame.
>
> — Robert Hunter, "Truckin'," American Beauty

Though Kesey and the Pranksters thought they had the answers to many of life's burning questions, Wolfe doesn't pretend to. He merely tries to gives us images of the many different aspects of the Prankster experience—the fun and the freedom, and also the failures. Wolfe doesn't pull back when the going gets rough: he doesn't clean up anyone's language (and thus distort our image), and he doesn't turn his head or fail to catch the glistening details when fifty Hell's Angels have sex with an adventurous blonde who thought she was taking on only three.

More than anything else, Wolfe simply tries to give the reader images—the ability to perceive vividly in the imagination—of the life of the drug culture. And that ability to imagine is essential to the process of coming to grips with the complexity of ideas and feelings which sweeps over teenagers who are trying to find their way in a society that offers a mind-boggling array of choices. One cannot mold the values of the young by preaching at them or by trying to scare them away from experiences. Rock n' roll surges in and carries them off to delicious, vigorous ecstasies. "If it feels so right, you know it can't be wrong" are lyrics that appear in countless rock songs. (Are there any rock songs that advocate careful analysis of one's situations and choices?)

It is, indeed, foolish to deny or devalue many aspects of the Counter Culture: its music is particularly vivid and alive, and some of its philosophical connections are profound. And Wolfe spends some time, in addition to giving images of the Life, trying to place the ideas in historical, philosophical context, at one point linking up not only to Jung but also to "Plotinus, Lao-tse, Pico della Mirandola, Agrippa, Kepler, Leibniz." (p. 142) In another place he points out the similarity between the LSD experience and the religious experiences of Mohammed, Zoroaster, Saul of Tarsus, Christian Rosenkreuz, Emmanuel Swedenborg, and Meister Eckhart. (p. 128)

In these days when there is widespread, even vehement, public argument about whether to take a few minutes out of the school day for prayer, many of us are afraid to even bring up religious or spiritual experiences as a subject in the classroom on some vague fear of violating a student's fragile religious freedom. As a result, most Americans are vastly ignorant of the great religious forces which—though they may be only minor sub-currents in our own secular culture—are major motivations for action elsewhere in the world. And the Holy Wars that threaten to topple our economy, our foreign-energy dependent existence, go completely without understanding. Worse yet, as teachers we often find it difficult even to talk to students about the three great forces that underlie all spiritual thought: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty.

Couched in raw language and in images of unconventional living though it may be, Tom Wolfe's The Electric Kool-Aid

Acid Test presents an opportunity—indeed, a necessity—to think through those essential questions of value. Nothing gets preached. The floor is merely opened for discussion.

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Upholding Moral Principles: A Farewell to Arms

It is surely no accident that Ernest Hemingway's famous World War I novel, A Farewell to Arms, has probably been the most consistently popular of his fiction since it was originally published in 1929. Hemingway, then a brash young Midwesterner and a sometime-newspaper correspondent, was a legitimate war hero himself. Living in Paris with his young family, he had already gained the admiring respect of that small group of critics and reviewers who were attuned to the new voices and styles which exploded in the aftermath of the Great War. His 1925 volume of short stories, In Our Time, and his first novel, The Sun Also Rises, had already established him in the forefront of that group already beginning to be called The Lost Generation. His reputation, however, barely extended beyond those relatively few who read the transient little magazines and followed the development of the new movements in art. The appearance of A Farewell to Arms proved conclusively that Hemingway's pared-to-the-bone style and unblinking tough-minded view of life under extreme conditions could excite the enthusiasm of a large popular audience as readily as it could gain the respect of the intellectual establishment. A Farewell to Arms shot swiftly toward the top of the bestseller charts and —as evidenced by the fact that it has been given several film adaptations and it has never been out of print—it has remained a favorite for more than half a century.

Hemingway's achievement in this respect can hardly be overstated and it is worthy of special notice. No other major writer in the 20th Centruy—either in America or anywhere else in the world—has succeeded so well in attracting the deep and continued affections of the popular mass audience, while, at the same time, maintaining an integrity of performance with the critics and scholars of the world. And this fact has particular significance in reference to school syllabi and reading lists. As we all know, the enormous growth of the film and television industries and the vast changes in reading habits have contributed toward the forming of an almost unbridgeable gap between the "serious" reader and the average person. In fact, some educators fear that the traditional "common reader" is high on the list of endangered species. It would not be entirely wrong to suggest that the average person growing up in the 1980's may never read a supposedly "great" book except as an assignment in school. And, as we also know, such compulsory reading is often painful and so grudgingly undertaken as to turn many young people away from serious reading permanently. Hemingway's fiction, on the contrary, has consistently entertained average readers, leading them to think about the essential moral dilemmas which are inherent in life—even as they believe that they are merely engrossed in a fast-moving, poignant adventure story. A standard item in American schools for over forty years, A Farewell to Arms has been translated into virtually every major language and been published in generous numbers around the world. It has served significantly to define for ourselves, as well as other people, the best of America's ideals and a kind of irreducible American spirit.

Experts and scholars will argue with varying degrees of persuasiveness that some of Hemingway's other titles are artistically or philosophically more rigorous or compelling. The Sun Also Rises, The Old Man and The Sea, "The Big Two-Hearted River," "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" are some of the titles usually cited as preferable. But average readers have intuitively understood that A Farewell to Arms exerts a more intimate grip and encompasses a wider scope than those other works. This exciting tale of love and war—and the painful, permanent costs of both—speaks with immediate power to urgent human concerns. Younger readers, especially—those who are in the process of emerging from the taken-for-granted sureties of childhood dependence—are presented with a surprisingly relevant text. They are likely to find this account of the tense relationship between Frederic Henry, the American volunteer officer, and Catherine Barkley, the British nurse, startlingly familiar. They may not have the history of the Italian-Austrian campaigns of World War I too clearly in mind. But they swiftly recognize that the war-heightened struggle of Frederic and Catherine to attain a mutually fruitful love in the midst of battles, wounds, retreats, and the bewildering codes of different languages, customs, and countries is not a story they can keep at arm's length. It is far too close to them. They perceive that the fictional struggle of Frederic and Catherine incisively mirrors their own inarticulate and barely comprehended attempts to chart a passage through the storms of adolescence without losing their self-respect or their ingrained reverence for the cardinal pieties of life.

For, like many of these younger readers, the hero and heroine of Hemingway's novel find themselves, with brutal suddenness, living in a different country than they had been accustomed to. They have been uprooted, displaced—not just geographically—but, more important, socially and psychologically. As their initial physical attraction for one another deepens into love—particularly after Frederic's wound and convalescence in the hospital in Milan—they find themselves all at once terrifyingly on their own, unsupported by familial care or even familiar customs and codes of behavior. The ground is constantly shifting beneath their feet as impersonally commanded armies advance and fall back; as battle-orders mysteriously change; and as the landscape erupts and flying shrapnel rends the flesh and innocent blood flows. They had originally entered into their love affair as a casual game, a sequence of thoughtless impulses, a pleasure which would cost little. But even as the military campaign becomes increasingly chaotic, cruel, and senseless, their love affair intensifies, accelerates, and goes beyond a gratifying game played by two detached participants. The two lovers are forced to make their own judgments, moment by moment, aware that their decisions will change their futures unalterably. They must try to test the rock-bottom validity of their immediate emotions; they have to find out what they really feel underneath their romantic fantasies and impulsive desires. For the first time in their lives, they are obliged to search themselves to find out what they honestly value and, further, learn precisely how much they are willing to surrender or sacrifice to uphold those values.

And these younger readers will be quick to notice that Hemingway does not cheat or "cop out" or prettify reality. Neither the soft-focus photography of technicolor or the cynical falsities of saccharine melodrama are allowed to turn this treatment of an eternal human problem into a sentimental fantasy which pretends that happiness exacts no price. Like the world that all human beings are born into, Hemingway's world insists that actions bear consequences, a goodly portion of which are pain and loss. And Hemingway is careful to avoid making cardboard characters who are programmed to behave virtuously or badly, bravely or ingloriously. Frederic is young and untested when he arrives in Italy. Fundamentally decent, he is also immature, selfish, and inclined to be emotionally shallow. Catherine, on the other hand, desperately hurt by the death of her fiance, is as manipulative in her way as Frederic is in his. Emotionally numbed, she accepts his advances with as much self-centered concern as does he. Hemingway is sympathetic to his two lovers, but he presents them as a young couple with a good deal to learn about the true nature of the world and themselves.

For, ultimately, although the main themes of A Farewell to Arms are love and war, those themes are subservient to a narrower literary purpose: a recognition and partial definition of the moral terms within which Hemingway sees all experience as being necessarily constrained. Although this is justly called a great "war-novel,"—and the famous description of the retreat at Caporetto is acknowledged to be one of the most vivid and cogent pieces of battle-description in literature—the war is, in a sense, merely the setting where a young man and a young woman assume gingerly and awkwardly the burdens of maturity. As with Henry Fleming in Stephen Crane's classic Civil War novel, A Red Badge of Courage, Frederic and Catherine must test their courage and assert their independence from the past. Catherine succeeds in shaking herself free from her paralyzing grief. In her capacity to care deeply for Frederic, she ceases to be an emotional zombie. It is as a whole and healed young woman that she chooses freely to cast her lot with him as he declares "a separate peace" and they flee the battlefront for the neutral haven of Switzerland.

Frederic's struggle for maturity is more closely detailed in the novel—if only because he is telling his own story. At the beginning of the action, isolated in an unusual set of circumstances from both familiar guidance or even restrictive rules against which he can rebel, Frederic is totally "free" and thoroughly confused about who or what he really is. Through his day-to-day experiences in Italy, he learns that the true value of freedom is the extent to which it leads a person to set restraints and limitations on his unbridled desires. Without self-imposed limits, he learns that all behavior is equally meaningless. He also learns that the sole gauge of value that he can trust is his own sense of self-respect—an adamant, undeniable judgment which lies deep beneath any temporary feeling of pleasure or pain.

For Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms places a challenge on its principal characters that goes one step beyond Crane's A Red Badge of Courage. Independence is only the first stage in the progress toward responsible maturity. Catherine Barkley and Frederic Henry must also measure out the extent to which their newly achieved independence must be surrendered in their attainment of a mutual love. For, if one of the aims of adolescence is independent, free-standing self-reliance, a second aim—and one which may often be on a collision course with the former—is that union of independencies in a mature love-relationship which requires an open acceptance of vulnerability and dependence. This is, of course, one of the most painful and difficult of human laws to learn and truly accept. It is to the enormous credit of A Farewell to Arms that this inexorable moral principle is unflinchingly, movingly dramatized at the very core of the novel.

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If We Can't Trust
The Pertinence of Judy Blume's *Forever*

I had found Judy Blume's *Forever* on a drug store rack in 1981. The cover blurbs described it as a story in which young lovers fulfill physical desire for the first time and then face unsettling problems. Expecting the book to be pitched in between *Wifey* and *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, I bought it as a gift for my daughter. The cashier asked if the book was for a young reader, and on hearing *sixteen* said only that the work was not for very young readers like some of Judy Blume's other stories.

My expectations for the book were about right. But it took awhile for me to be able to find out for myself. I gave the book with a request to borrow it once my daughter had read it, but I learned that the work spoke rivetingly to young readers when my daughter's stepsister had started reading the book and then passed it on to her own friend before it could be loaned back to me. Paul Zindel's appeal as a novelist had manifested itself to me earlier in the same way, so I could recognize the symptoms. I bought my own copy of *Forever*. The book surprised me in some ways, but I liked it enough to have now used it twice in a college freshman composition class. It's a valuable contemporary fiction, and I'm glad it's available for my daughter, more recently my oldest son, those of their generation, and anyone else who wants to, to read.

Forever follows Katherine Danziger, a high school senior, from a New Year's eve meeting through a love affair, summer separation and breakup with Michael Wagner, a young man her own age. The plot follows the growth of greater intimacy between them in the face of a guarded response by her parents to her getting "serious" with Michael. Her grandmother shows less reserve and encourages her to learn about birth control. Two of Katherine's peers follow contrapuntal paths. More readily than Katherine, her best friend Erica looks forward to sexual intimacy with her boyfriend, but he attempts suicide because of latent homosexuality. Meanwhile Sybil, Erica's cousin, has become pregnant, gives birth at the time of their high school graduation, and puts the baby up for adoption.

The title comes from the pledge Katherine gives to Michael after they have said "I love you" to each other. For both of them it is the first time saying the words to express romantic affection.

> [Michael:] "Remember last night when I said I loved you?"
>
> "Yes."
>
> "Well...I really meant it..."
>
> "I know...because I love you too." I whispered into his chest. Saying it the first
> time was the hardest. There's something so final about it.
> The second time I sat up and said it right to him.
>
> "I love you, Michael Wagner."
>
> "Forever?" he asked.
>
> "Forever," I said.

Michael later reciprocates the pledge in the engraving of a neckpiece he gives her for her birthday. She writes "Forever" with a birthday gift to him. The word has become the *bona fide* of a love, to express which is to say something *final*. When they separate for the summer they close their letters with the one word promise.

After Katherine has gotten close enough to another young man, Theo, for him to ask her about the engraving, she writes a letter to Michael, telling him "I made promises to you that I'm not sure I can keep." But she can't finish the letter and tears it up.

Shortly thereafter, Michael drives hundreds of miles to visit her. When Katherine wants to talk about her uncertain feelings, Michael feels rejected, and his anger precipitates their breakup. The novel closes with Katherine believing "I will never be sorry for loving him... Maybe if we were ten years older it would have worked out differently. Maybe. I think it's just that I'm not ready for forever."

The central theme of the novel is thus: although apt to consider itself immortal, first love is especially unlikely to be so. The simplicity of this subject does not make it unworthy of treatment. In fact Blume has built a considerable audience with her ability to treat realistically familiar kinds of growing pains. This novel, however, has stirred controversy. At least two aspects of the story share responsibility. In one, extensive physical intimacy, including intercourse, develops between high school students. Yet, secondly, Katherine does not grow to consider their love a mistake. Blume's *Forever* celebrates a teenage sexuality which does not end in marriage.

A major story form in English since Shakespeare's time has been romantic comedy—a tale ending in marriage for the protagonist as a reconciliation of aspiration and practicality. In the imaginative literature I'm loosely characterizing, the choice of a permanent sexual partner in a state-sanctioned union is pictured as the fitting vehicle for further emotional and social development. With exceptions like the Welsh *Mabinogi*, in most earlier Western Indo-European writing, if sexual love was celebrated, it took place outside of state-legitimated unions. Blume's story does not challenge the tradition of romantic comedy. She postpones the potentially "happy ever after" ending, but does not destroy it. The novel maintains a tension between this traditional frame of reference and a new kind of female protagonist who, despite, and in fact because of, the loss of her virginity becomes more self-assertive and self-respecting. As one of my students pointed out to me, the novel vindicates Katherine's parents in separating her for the summer from Michael because they were too young to be making life plans together. The parents' program for summer employment is aired after they find out that Katherine has chosen a college solely to maximize time with Michael.

The incongruity between self-discovery for the emerging female protagonist and the book's version of practical limits for social life is most acutely drawn in the relation between Katherine and her younger sister Jamie. Becoming sexually active herself, Katherine passes also into the adult view that it is desirable to control the sexual development of her younger sister. In a letter from summer camp where Jamie is a resident and Katherine a tennis instructer, she reports to her parents on a special staff meeting which discusses keeping the emphasis among the camp residents "on friendship, not sex!" She has just described a boyfriend relationship her sister has developed and so adds, "Don't worry about Jamie, though. I'm keeping an eye on her." Her letter to Erica three days later points the contradition even more sharply between what is right for her peers and what is right for youngsters like her sister. She asks Erica: "Remember your vow to get laid before college? Well, I've been thinking about that and I've decided it might be just what you need." Yet in the same letter she talks about Marsha, one "kid" who is not "okay." Marsha has been "hanging around the tennis court because of Theo. When I compare us at fifteen to Marsha, I can see that times are really changing...and not for the better, in my opinion. I wouldn't want to see Jamie carrying on like that in two years." Unconscious jealousy may be part of Katherine's motive, as may be resentment of Marsha's less inhibited personal style. But surely a line still exists between what is proper for adults and proper for kids. Only, Katherine now draws the line with herself and Erica on the other side of it.

Forever reflects some shifts in contemporary standards, but the novel is hardly a tract for wantonness. It gives good insight into an array of joys and pains entailed in sustaining an intimate relationship. My main problem with the book concerns the narrowness of its class perspective. Almost everyone seems obliviously affluent, with neither money worries nor ambitions. This contributes some triviality, and the characterization of Michael suffers because the "floaty" well-to-do background leaves his origins too vague. In addition, a parent troubled by the sexual ethic of the book might consider it a dangerous guide for someone less buffered by money. Life might then be more likely to include the threat of violence from a more possessive male than Michael or Katherine's father. Not every woman who might give up a baby for adoption, like Sybil, can start a new life by going off to college. And what of Michael? Why does this gently insistent, though unreflective male come up with the criterion of "forever"? The book offers no explanation, and it seems to me the focus is one that females are more likely to have been socialized to. The book gives Katherine's point of view: Michael's motives remain compulsions.

For all this, however, as much as it is possible to do so, I think the book does hope to offer wisdom to an emerging adult about becoming "completely vulnerable" to another person. Katherine's mother tells her: "It's up to you to decide what's right and wrong... I'm not going to tell you to go ahead but I'm not going to forbid it either. It's too late for any of that. I expect you to handle it with a sense of responsibility though...either way." Mrs. Danziger has just said she might have made different choices for herself today, and so the question of right and wrong is truly open in her statement. But even a parent with certainty needs to recognize a point when a child has to make his or her own decisions.

My title comes from a statement made in a broadcast discussion of whether we should be willing to talk with children about the possibility of nuclear war: "If we cannot trust our children, how can we ever expect them to trust us?" The words echoed enough in my head that I wrote them down and thought of their pertinence to Judy Blume's book later.

Some Books

Judy Blume, Forever (NY: Gulf and Western, 1976); Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret (NY: Dell, 1970); Wifey NY: Gulf and Western, 1979).

Paul Zindel, The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-In-The-Moon Marigolds (NY: Bantam, 1973); The Pigman (NY: Dell, 1968).

Ursula LeGuin, The Beginning Place (NY: Bantam, 1981)/A modern romance with a female dragon; The Word for World is Forest (NY: Berkeley, 1976).

Dorothy Bryant, The Kin of Ata are Waiting for You (NY: Random House, 1976).

Roald Dahl, Danny The Champion of the World (NY: Knopf, 1975)/About a father and young boy; Charlie and The Great Glass Elevator (NY: Knopf, 1972).

Karl Fleming and Anne Taylor Fleming, eds., The First Time (NY: Berkeley Medallion, 1975)/Twenty-eight celebrities tell about their first sexual experiences.

Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, Abortion and Woman's Choice NY: Longman, 1984)/A detailed demographic argument.

Patrick Ford, ed. and trans. The Mabinogi (Berkeley: University of California, 1977).

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"Whatsoever Things are Pure..."

A Case for Go Ask Alice

I chose Go Ask Alice to review because I liked it, and because reading and discussing it with one student at an alternative high school had been extremely rewarding. Secondly, at that time it was one of the few books portraying the struggle to break through from adolescence to maturity from a female perspective.

Should Go Ask Alice be removed from high school curricula and libraries? This question in part concerns the merits and demerits of the particular book, and in part the merits and demerits of censorship itself. Because I had grown up in Arkansas, which has for years forbidden the teaching of evolution in the schools, I assumed, unreflectively, that I would be an expert on censorship. However, besides the evolution issue, I could not remember any public forum on any censorship issue in the school, community or newspaper. In Arkansas, much censorship was done privately, like Uncle Jim's handling of The Grapes of Wrath. He read it seated in a rocking chair by the kitchen stove, raising the stove-lid and tossing in each page as he finished it. It was not fit for his children to read, he said, and the one who had bought the book never protested.

My own parents were less autocratic: my sister acquired a list of books which could be borrowed by mail from the state library in Little Rock, and we were allowed to send for any, so long as we paid the return postage. That list was probably carefully selected to avoid offending the taxpayers, but still our mother sometimes made mild objections. She floated by, murmuring "...whatsoever things are good, whatsoever things are pure...think ye on these things." But this genteel censorship threatened to get stronger my first day at the high school. I chose from its paltry offerings a thick book entitled Scarlet Sister Mary, only to have the librarian refuse to check it out to me. "It's not a good book." When I protested that my sister had already read it, she let me take it. This was puzzling: was our family so upright that we could not be corrupted by "bad" books? Or (more interesting) were we so depraved that "bad" books could not make us worse? It did not occur to me then that the librarian might have been simply protecting herself—that if the book had been in our house already then my parents would not be likely to make any complaints to the school board. Later, at the University of Arkansas library, where I was a page, certain books were kept in a locked glass case. A co-worker laughed at me for thinking that the case was for rare books. She showed me sample titles—Tropic of Cancer is the one I remember. I purchased my own Henry Millers; his books could be checked out, but the procedure was not one I wanted to go through. You had to show that you, or your purposes, were on the level. One last instance of private censorship (though not of books) sticks in my mind. Sparked by a talented dancer brought to Fayetteville by the Ford Foundation, a group of community members began having square dances in a local barn loft. Fundamentalist neighbors considered this the devil's work so they quietly torched the barn one night after a rain. Without a good place, the dancers were unable to get together again. Those who thought they knew what was best for everyone had won again.

It took a public crusade against Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" in our local high school to make me understand public censorship writ large. In a long evening of testimony, carefully moderated by the school district committee, students, teachers, administrators and concerned citizens spoke for or against the teaching of the book. Piecing together the statements of the opposition, an amazing picture was revealed. It was a picture of a world in which all conflict is absent. Children never question the values or customs of their parents; there is no violence (except that sanctioned by the ascending generation); in short, everyone thinks only about what the censors hold to be good and true. If there are dark pockets of evil in individuals or in the culture, these are not to be thought of or read about. It is my own position that as long as there are such, censorship is neither appropriate nor effective. However, there remains the possibility that some books should not be taught to high school students for reasons connected with those above. (I exclude here the ones that are not appropriate because they are too simple—The Bobbsey Twins, perhaps, or those puerile, like Harlequin Romances. I should probably also exclude some of the essays I assign my college freshmen on the grounds that they lack the vocabulary and experience to understand them.)

Go Ask Alice has been challenged by concerned citizens in many school systems across the country. What are its particular merits or demerits as a book to include in a high school library or curriculum? The pro-censorship policy is to focus on its demerits first. I will therefore reverse this policy and ask why Go Ask Alice is a good book to teach in high school or junior high. Why include it in the curriculum?

Perhaps the main reason has already been stated: it deals with that crucial theme, an adolescent's struggles toward maturity. Its proximate subject is the fifteen-year-old drug user on whose diary it is based, and it has the immediacy of the first person. The editors tell us that the book furnishes no answers to the problem of adolescent drug users, but that they "...hope it will provide insights into the increasingly complicated world in which we live." This theme is echoed in the diary, when the author goes with her father to see Dr. ____, who is concerned about the youth of the 1960's: "1,000 college-age kids commit suicide every year and another 9,000 try to. VD has gone up 25% among kids my age and pregnancies are really growing, even with the pill. He also said that crime and mental illness among kids has skyrocketed" (104). Her own increasing drug involvement, her mental illness and institutionalization and her possible suicide will later bring this all home to the reader. Although these particular statistics are outdated, the underlying problems are still with us, and students might learn a good deal from folowing the author's unsuccessful efforts to deal with her complex environment. (Who was it that said that in literature we let the characters make our own mistakes, instead of ourselves?) Peer pressure, exacerbated by her history of drug dealing, is another theme important for students. The other "freaks" won't let her go but pursue her for drugs and spike the candy that sets off her psychotic episode, despite her good resolutions. The message, for students who are tempted to use drugs (other than alcohol) is as clear as in any morality play. Actually, I was reminded of Dylan Thomas' Christmas recollection of the story of the child who was told not to skate on a particular lake, and who did, and who drowned. The message is that if you use drugs, they'll kill you or ruin your life. There is an additional message for women; the author only became a pusher to help out her boyfriend. "...since I'm Rich's chick all the way I have to do what I can to help him." (45) What happened in that relationship is surely adequate to make the traditional feminine ideal of self-sacrifice less attractive.

So far, I have been discussing the message of the book. But what's there to interest students? I have said that there is a theme as old as Daedalus and Icharus, that of a young one unsuccessfully straining to become an adult. The diarist's dreams of becoming a child psychologist, of somehow understanding the troubled young ones, are reminiscent of Holden Caulfield's dreams of becoming a catcher in the rye. As the diary opens, the writer's mood is black from some real or imagined disappointment in love, but her mother is nagging her to clean her room. Her question, "Can't I even have the privacy of my own soul?" is maudlin, but I'm certain my own children would have understood it well. Her subsequent reflections about the difficulties of being a teenager would strike a responsive chord in most students and perhaps teachers and parents also: "Adolescents have a very rocky insecure time. Grown-ups treat them like children and yet expect them to act like adults. They give them orders like little animals, they expect them to react like mature, and always rational, self-assured persons of legal stature. It is a difficult, lost, vacillating time." (66) This passage strikes a sour note after her previous note of joy. Having been allowed to help clean up after the Christmas rituals, she exclaimed "I feel grown-up. I am no longer in the category with the children, I am one of the adults! And I love it! They have accepted me as an individual, as a personality, as an identity. I belong! I am important! I am somebody!" (66)

With material like that, Go Ask Alice would seem to be a winner for high school students. What, then, is the matter with it? My own reading suggests the following possible grounds: 1) language; 2) drugs; and 3) sexual violence, although it is reported rather than described. Edward B. Jenkinson's book, Censors in the Classroom (Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1979) gives a brief history of the book's censorship career in which language is prominent, but other grounds are invoked. In Warsaw, Indiana, it was "found objectionable by patrons of our schools" (7); citizens testifying found "no educational value" in a book containing "these kinds of obscenities" (12). Park Rapids, Deer River, and Grand Rapids, Minnesota, thought it was pornography, mainly because of its gutter language. Adams-Friendship, Wisconsin, removed it from its library shelves because it was "filthy"; Red Cross, Pennsylvania, found the language shocking, and the Save our Children group from Trenton, New Jersey, thought it a "dirty book", or, in short, "trash."

It is clear that the primary ground for objecting to Go Ask Alice is its language. Persons objecting to it have gained support, and gleaned publicity, by reading, out of context, from pages 76-85. This is virtually the only section which contains objectionable language; later, in the mental institution, there are some obscenities, but they are not the writer's language. In the brief section which uses what my mother would have called "gutter language," the diarist has run away to Denver and, going farther West, is thrown among the lowest elements in society. How else could the writer get across the idea that she is absolutely at the lowest point of her life? One wonders just how those persons who favored censorship of this book found these few pages, and how they were able, in conscience, to ignore their context.

The second major, though diffuse, charge is that the book is "trash," or without educational value. I hope that my discussion of the significant themes treated in this book have convinced the reader that Go Ask Alice is worthwhile. But as the previous discussion was centered around its importance to the student, I should like now to emphasize its importance to all of us. The author dreams of succeeding at just what is important in a viable culture—growing up to measure up to the values of her parents. She wants to coordinate successful dinner parties for her future husband's friends, to make orange yeast rolls like her grandmother's, to go to bed with a man who loves her. Caught as she is between the raw drug world and the overprotected world of a faculty brat, she is unable to grow up. This is not perceived as a failure in those values to which she aspired but in her character and situation. In her later reflective mood she muses that "kids who aren't allowed to make any decisions for themselves never grow up, and kids who have to make all the decisions before they're ready never grow up either." (151). To my mind, as a parent and teacher, that is the real dilemma of growing up, or raising or teaching children who are struggling to grow up. How, then, can the book be trashy?

What catches us all in Go Ask Alice is the ideal of home, poised against the harsh realities of adolescence. It is doubtless over-idealized: "Home, Home, Home. Oh what a beautiful, divinely lovely word." (149) Indeed, since The Wind in the Willows I have never seen such a panegyric for home. The diarist, at rock bottom, talks to different street people about what they want from life. Most wanted to go back home "...but felt they couldn't because that would mean giving up their identity." (88) She then finds Alice, sitting stoned on the curb. "She didn't know whether she was running away from something or running to something, but she admitted that deep in her heart she wanted to go home." (88) Of course, when the diarist is home her parents love and support her but do not at all understand what she is going through.

Should Go Ask Alice be taught now? The white heat of the sixties is over. The problem drug in Wisconsin is alcohol, not acid. Some may find the book somewhat dated as did my friend who taught it in a small town in northeastern Wisconsin. Time that could have been spent in discussing issues of substance was spent in explaining drug jargon. Still, the struggle of the young to become adults is hardly over. "Home," considered as a nucleus of values that is supposed to sustain students as they grow older, or go elsewhere, may not suffice. How are we to prepare our students to deal with these problems? It is that problem which Go Ask Alice addresses, and students can learn from her mistakes.

It is perhaps appropriate in this review to let the diarist have the last word.

> I don't think I will [keep another diary]. Diaries are great when you're young. In fact, you saved my sanity a hundred, thousand, million times. But I think when a person gets older she should be able to discuss her problems and thoughts with other people, instead of just with another part of herself as you have been to me. (158)

The author closed communciation lines, and died three weeks after having decided not to keep another diary. A stronger case for continuing public discussion of the painful yet universal themes in such books as Go Ask Alice or Catcher in the Rye could hardly be made.

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An Apologia for Pearl Buck's The Good Earth

Pearl Sydenstricker Buck, the author of The Good Earth, spent her childhood and early adult years in China as the daughter of Presbyterian missionaries and as the wife of an American agricultural expert. As such, she had a thorough knowledge of China's social customs and rural folkways. The depth of her knowledge comes out in The Good Earth as she traces the life of Wang Lung from his marriage to his rise to wealth as a farmer and a member of the rich, leisured class to his imminent death at the end of the story and his sons' anticipatory sale of the land. Those readers with certain biases could condemn the book on a number of counts, most significantly on its exploitation of women. Embedded in the view of women, which is a strong part of the plot, are the sexual mores brought out in the story, the accepted murder or enslavement of young girls, and the dominance of men over women. What comes out in the novel is a strong statement of an overall inferiority of women under male dominance. However, anyone making a critical statement of the novel could only praise it for its honest, forthright expose of a culture and a time quite different from that of the United States today.

Alexander Pope, an eighteenth century writer whose advice to critics in his "Essay on Criticism" is as valid today as when the poem was written, tells critics that they must know thoroughly the work which they are criticizing. This does not mean the story line only but all that the story line embraces. As Alexander Pope states, the critic should know the story's "character" in all of its aspects:

> His [the author's] fable, subject, scope in every page,
> Religion, country, genius of his age.[1]
>
> (ll. 119-120)

The second of the quoted lines is most important here. The critic must know the country in which the story is placed and must know as well the country from which the author comes. The importance of this is readily apparent. In order to determine the validity of the plot and all that it entails, the critic must know thoroughly the landscape in which the plot is encased and must be certain that the authority of the writer is such as to present a credible statement overall. To fully understand and appreciate The Good Earth, the critic must then know something about China and the customs of China, not only about China generally, but particularly, in its agricultural nature. The critic, as is true of the writer, must know, furthermore, the age in which the plot is set. In this case the age is that in which Pearl Buck herself came to know and to love China, especially those five years after her graduation in 1914 from Randolph-Macon College when she and her husband lived in China, he as a teacher of agriculture and she as an observer of China and its people. As Alexander Pope says, the critic must weigh all elements together in reading a story, to know the "scope of every page." And Pope cautions the critic further that "Without all these at once before your eyes/ Cavil you may, but never criticize." (11. 122-123) Those, then, who condemn The Good Earth because they are ignorant of the story's total statement, and concentrate their criticism only on isolated aspects, are being picayune and can never be accepted as valid critics.

But to isolate some of those aspects which might cause cavillers to denounce the book and call for its removal from library shelves and classroom curricula is to highlight Pearl Buck's own sympathy for and understanding of the culture of which she writes. She does not condemn the flaws of that culture as the cavillers might wish she had. She writes the truth as she knows it, and to do less than to expose the Chinese culture of the early nineteen hundreds in all its raw humanity is to falsify on historical fact. On the other hand, to apologize for that culture is to demean a people who were living according to their time and their understanding. A dog cannot be condemned for not being a cat. The culture of one time and place cannot be condemned for not being the culture of quite another time and place. As Alexander Pope points out, a critic must judge a culture according to its own time, which forbids, then, measuring it by a supposedly more enlightened age or culture.

The exploitation of women was certainly a part of the Chinese culture of the early nineteenth century, but such exploitation was not limited to China of that time. Other cultures, even that of the United States, had yet much to learn about the equality of women to men. Pearl Buck took a universal condition of mankind and concentrated it into the culture most familiar to her. In that male-dominated world women existed only for the use of man, sexually and domestically. Outside of that, women had no reason for being; they had no entity of their own. Yet, in his own household, except for his treatment of his wife O-Lan, Wang Lung, the main character of the story, has some concern for the women in his charge—his daughters and his concubines. At the time of famine, when it would have been socially acceptable for Wang Lung to sell his oldest daughter into slavery for the few pieces of silver she would have brought to feed the family, he refused to consider the possibility. Still later, when this same daughter, probably because she did not have the nutriments necessary in her infant years, proved so mentally deficient that she had to be brought in out of the rain (184-185; 253-254),[2] even then Wang Lung loved her, although in other Chinese households of the day such a daughter would likely have been allowed to die. Further, in Wang Lung's final years, one of his concerns was that this "poor fool," as he called her, would not, when he died, be neglected, even if it meant giving her a poisonous potion. (253) While a Christian-Judaic culture would recoil at such an expedient, the reader must accept that a non-Christian-Judaic culture cannot be expected to act according to modes other than those that inform it. And in presenting the expedient acceptable in the non-Christian-Judiac culture, the author is in no way condoning it or offering it to any other culture. The author, truthful to her topic, must use what that topic presents to her. Interestingly enough, while Alexander Pope's "Essay on Criticism" is a lesson for critics, what Pope says is valid for writers as well; and a writer must know the time and the place in which the plot is set. "Follow Nature," declares Pope. (1. 68) And Pearl Buck, in upholding this dictum, must truthfully portray this non-Christian-Judaic culture according to its nature. We, as readers, cannot on any grounds condemn either the author or the story for the truth which they present.

Concubinage or plural wives is a facet in a number of non-Christian cultures even today. Readers coming from a Christian culture who have a cosmopolitan rather than a parochial understanding of the world will accept this for the adherents of those cultures while recognizing that it is not part of a Christian-Judaic culture or a society formed by Christian-Judaic tenets. Although concubinage was a part of early Chinese ways, Buck's The Good Earth does not condone it while presenting it. When Wang Lung forsakes his wife O-Lan for Lotus, the brothel whore, Wang Lung's former attitude towards O-Lan of disinterested acceptance now turns into anger. The anger stems partly from his shame of his wife and partly from his shame of himself. When Wang Lung becomes aware of his wife as a woman, he begins to compare the workhorse O-Lan with the exotic, pampered Lotus. He speaks roughly to O-Lan and nags her for her plainness:

> "Now anyone looking at you would say you were the wife of a common fellow." (121)
>
> ". . .cannot you buy a little oil for your hair as other women do and make yourself a new coat of black cloth?" (121)
>
> "I have labored and grown rich and I would have my wife look less like a hind. And those feet of yours—" (122)

But throughout his nagging Wang Lung is ashamed as he remembers how much he is indebted to O-Lan for the wealth and position which he now boasts of:

> in his heart, he was ashamed that he reproached this creature who through all these years had followed him faithfully as a dog. . . . (121)
>
> he was ashamed that he was angry at her and angry because she would not be angry in return but was only frightened. (122)
>
> His ill temper grew as he walked to the town because he remembered suddenly that all these new lands of his he could not have bought in a lifetime if O-Lan had not seized the handful of jewels from the rich man's house and if she had not given them to him when he commanded her. (122)
>
> Wang Lung watched her [O-Lan] as she went and he was glad to be alone, but still ashamed [that O-Lan had discovered Lotus in her house] and he was angry that he was ashamed. . . . (146)

The anger, rooted in Wang Lung's shame, is an effect of guilt rising out of an injustice done to another. The offender is aware of that injustice but, refusing to accept the blame, becomes angry. Such anger, usually aimed at an innocent victim, results from an outpouring of the shame and hatred which the culprit feels toward himself at what he has done and causes the individual to act in unusual ways. This, then, and the idleness of a dry season, is what drives Wang Lung to take a concubine. He had seen the new tea house in the town, and initially, had looked upon it "filled with horror at the thought of how money was spent there in gambling and in play and in evil women." (123) Now, however, filled with shame at his treatment of O-Lan and angry with himself, or as the narrator of the story explains, "wishing to escape from the reproach of his own heart when he remembered that he had been unjust to his wife," (123) Wang Lung goes to the tea room and in time takes the petite Lotus as his mistress. While Pearl Buck does not sermonize in presenting a cultural aspect which she herself as a member of a Christian-Judaic culture could not accept, she presents it in such a way that the evils inherent in the system of concubinage are readily apparent to the reader. The injustice to the wife who has helped the husband through her work and her unselfishness comes through clearly as a condemnation of such exploitation. Of her own will O-Lan collected horse dung each day to fertilize the fields and helped Wang Lung with the hoeing and planting. (20-22) When, in a time of revolution, O-Lan found a bag of jewels hidden in a deserted Great House, she gave them to Wang Lung when he demanded them; and with these he added more land to his holding. (104-105) Later when Wang Lung demanded the two pearls which he had allowed O-Lan to keep from her find to give the pearls to his Lotus, the overwhelming injustice to O-Lan is readily apparent. (134) Further, the problem of having a wife and a mistress in the same house condemns concubinage economically when Wang Lung discovers that he must build a second house, kitchen and all, for Lotus and her maid Cuckoo.

Finally, that concubinage was not altogether condoned by the Chinese although the practice was widespread among those who could afford it is evident in the horror of Wang Lung's father when he sees the painted Lotus for the first time standing in the court of the house which was his home. While O-Lan is sullenly rebellious at this invasion, the father calls out the truth of the situation:

> "There is a harlot in the house!" and he would not be silent. . .he shouted over and over, "There is a harlot here!" And he said suddenly, seeing Wang Lung near him, "And I had one woman and my father had one woman and we farmed the land." And again he cried out after a time, "I say it is a harlot!" (150)

Anyone, therefore, who would condemn The Good Earth on the grounds that it sanctions concubinage is grossly misreading the text. The shame that Wang Lung experiences as he becomes more involved with Lotus attests to his discomfort with the situation, and the guilt-ridden anger which he levels at O-Lan further demonstrates that Wang Lung is conscious of transgressing his marriage code. The injustice to O-Lan is strongly communicated and is, in the very narration of the multiplied incidents, a condemnation of concubinage. Finally, the horror of the father at something which had not before been a practice in his family demonstrates that even in a culture where such a practice was socially accepted, it was not accepted by everyone.

The exploitation of women sexually is again condemned by the narration of the numerous incidents in which women are shown as sex objects only. The idle life of Lotus which denies her any personhood demonstrates that she is as spiritually imprisoned by the cultural view that women are only to be beautiful for the pleasure of men as O-Lan is by the sufferings which she has undergone because she is not beautiful. The reader with any humanity of spirit must see the great misery that O-Lan has known to such an extent that her inner spirit, her person, is a dulled imprisoned entity. Her femaleness in a male-dominated world, her enslavement, her homeliness, her poverty, her marriage to an uncommunicative husband who does not love her all contribute to a sense of such inferiority that O-Lan is virtually dumbed by it. Again and again as readers we are reminded through the description of her sad eyes of the being enslaved within O-Lan's body:

> Her eyes were small and of a dull black in color, and were filled with some sadness that was not clearly expressed. It was a face that seemed habitually silent and unspeaking, as though it could not speak if it would. (14)
>
> she looked quickly at Wang Lung, her eyes dumb. (16)
>
> a poor silent face that lay there, having endured to the utmost. (58)
>
> the face of O-Lan, inarticulate, dumb. (81)
>
> she looked at him [Wang Lung] piteously and sadly out of her strange dumb eyes that were like a beast's eyes that cannot speak. . . . (146)

In suffering the multipled psychological wounds from childhood on, O-Lan had nowhere to turn for redress. Children obeyed parents; servants obeyed employers; wives obeyed husbands, all without having anyone to turn to for consolation and justice. Because she was not beautiful, because she was a woman, because she was poor, O-Lan's repeated sufferings had caused her to turn inward that she was, as it were, frozen with fear and pain. This all began when O-Lan's parents sold her into slavery in the house of a rich family.

In the culture of which Pearl Buck writes, daughters were of little value because their destiny was marriage and the bearing of sons which, in that patriarchal society, meant that the daughter would go to live in the household of her husband where she would bear him the sons to help him in the fields and to care for him in his old age. When O-Lan bore a daughter to Wang Lung after the birth of two sons, he is angry and sees the daughter as a burden. For one thing, it is a person to feed using money which will not be repaid for, in Wang Lung's view, "daughters. . .do not belong to their parents, but are born and reared for other families." If daughters have any value, it is that they can be sold into slavery to one of the houses of the rich. This is what happened to O-Lan when she was ten. (13) With a drought on the land, her family had no money from crops to sustain them; and when the rains came, no money to buy seeds for the ground. O-Lan was sold, a sacrifice so her family could live. The narrator uses the word "slave" as a synonym for "girl" repeatedly throughout the story, signifying the social attitude towards females and the common practice of selling little girls into the houses of the wealthy.

Further, in a culture that prizes beauty, O-Lan again suffered. Her lack of beauty was evidently often thrown up to her in the household of the rich family where she was a slave. When Wang Lung went to the great house to get O-Lan as his bride, the Old Mistress boldly says before her, "She is not beautiful but that you do not need. Only men of leisure have the need for beautiful women to divert them. Neither is she clever. But she does well what she is told to do and she has a good temper. . . She has not beauty enough to tempt my sons and grandsons. . ." (13) As he looks at the woman who is to be his wife, Wang Lung is momentarily distressed that her feet are not bound, and it is this lack of an artificial beauty which later angers him further as he begins a new life in visiting his mistress Lotus whose feet "thrust into pink satin shoes no longer than a man's middle finger," (129) are so helpless that she sways on them as she stands. (144) Filled with shame and anger as he nags at O-Lan, Wang Lung yells at her, "And those feet of yours—" Forgetful of the help that O-Lan had been to him in the fields when he was a struggling farmer, a help that she never could have been with feet bound, the feet now become a symbol to Wang Lung of all of his wife's ugliness.

> It seemed to him that she was altogether hideous, but the most hideous of all were her big feet. . . (122)

The pain that must have been a part of O-Lan's spiritual enslavement showing forth only in her dumb, inarticulate face can be heard in those words she murmurs on her deathbed as she relives the formative years of her life—the pain of parents selling her as they might an extra ox or piece of furniture; the pain of her ugliness, so that her presence was an offense to others: and the physical pain of beatings and hunger during her enslavement:

> "I will bring the meats to the door only—and well I know I am ugly and cannot appear before the great lord. . . Do not beat me—I will never eat of the dish again. . .My father—my mother—my father—my mother. . . Well I know I am ugly and cannot be loved. (186)

And the added tragedy is that for all of the help O-Lan had been to Wang Lung, washing his clothes, preparing his meals, bearing his sons, and working in the fields beside him, he does not love her. Even though he spends days sitting beside her bed as she is dying, he does so out of shame and duty rather than love. In the culture which the story portrays, women are to be prized for beauty only; and this so blinds Wang Lung's eyes to O-Lan's goodness and concern for him in a totally unselfish love that he cannot love her in her ugliness. As he hears her murmurs, he is filled with shame but not with love:

> And he wondered and grieved at himself most of all because what she said was true, and even when he took her hand, desiring truly that she feel his tenderness towards her, he was ashamed because he could feel no tenderness, no melting of the heart such as Lotus could win from him with a pout of her lips. When he took this stiff dying hand, he did not love it, and even his pity was spoiled with repulsion towards it. (186)

In view, then, of the sufferings which sexual and domestic dominance cause, Pearl Buck's The Good Earth needs to be read for its humanitarian values rather than being banned from library shelves and English department curricula. The violation of women in their very humanity about which Pearl Buck writes is caught in a non-Christian-Judaic culture. Yet, what she writes about is a universal matter, as much a part of Christian-Judaic cultures as it is of non-Christian. In no way, whatever culture may be involved, does the book condone or teach the exploitation of women, either sexually in concubinage or domestically in wife-abuse. Rather, by the misery resulting from such exploitation as the novel brings out, the reader understands how demeaning it is, not only for those who are exploited but for those who do the exploiting as well. Anyone who condemns the book on the grounds that it does teach concubinage and wife-abuse is not a critic but a caviller.

[1] Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism," in Eighteenth Century English Literature, Geoffrey Tillotson, et.al., eds. (Chicago: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1969), 554-564.

[2] Pearl S. Buck, The Good Earth (New York: Washington Square Press, a Simon and Schuster division of Gulf & Western Corporation, 1973). All references to The Good Earth are taken from this edition.

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The Grapes of Wrath

Preserving Its Place in the Curriculum

In February 1980 the school board of Kanawha, Iowa, a small city in the northwestern part of Iowa, voted unanimously to ban The Grapes of Wrath from use in a sophomore English class. The book was allowed to remain in the school library. The action was taken as a result of a complaint by a parent who was vice-president of the local bank. The bank officer complained that the book was "profane, vulgar, and obscene," according to a report in the Des Moines Register (February 12, 1980).

It is an interesting coincidence that approximately at the same time the book was removed from use in the English class at Kanawha, the Committee on Peace and Justice of the Sioux City Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church issued a report concerning land ownership patterns in Iowa. The report stated that in the 14 northwestern counties of Iowa, 77% of the land was owned by absentee owners (Wall Street Journal, October 6, 1981). It is probably coincidental that a banker should attack The Grapes of Wrath for being "profane, vulgar, and obscene" and ignore the Jeffersonian agrarianism that runs through the book. Steinbeck's charge that capital is used to buy big tractors and drive farmers off the land may not have been apparent to the banker who complained about the book. But it is ironic that a novel which has such a theme as one of its organizing principles should be forbidden in a part of the country where traditionally the family farm has seemed to be a dominant feature of life.

However, the effort to censor this book, based on a failure to understand it, or perhaps to understand it too well, began as soon as the book was published in 1939. Attacks on the book were not confined to California, or to Oklahoma, but occurred across the entire United States. Successful efforts were made to censor the book in public libraries in Kansas City, Buffalo, and in many other places. Several copies were burned in St. Louis. The attacks have continued, making Steinbeck one of the two or three most frequently censured and censored novelists of the twentieth century. The attacks were no doubt stimulated by the immediate popularity of the book in 1939, a popularity which has continued across the decades. By 1979 the book had had more than 40 printings in the United States and over 20 printings in England.

The Grapes of Wrath illustrates Milton's principle in the Areopagitica that "books are not absolutely dead things but contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are..." The potency of The Grapes of Wrath grows out of the substantial degree of success that Steinbeck arrived at in creating a significant work of fiction from a major episode of American history, the depression and drouth years of the 1930's.

The continuing interest of literary critics along with general readers in The Grapes of Wrath is illustrated by the recent volume of critical essays, Twentieth Century Interpretations: The Grapes of Wrath, edited by Robert C. Davis (1982). The essays demonstrate that, as is typical of significant literary works, critics differ with regard to the interpretation of the various aspects of the novel. But the fertility of the critical views and the continuing ability of The Grapes of Wrath to generate critical interest suggests indeed that Milton's term "potency" does apply to the novel.

Steinbeck's success in creating a potent or powerful novel may be seen in the characters of the novel, in the complex structure of the novel, in the use of symbols, especially the contrast of the animal with the mechanical aspects of life, in the powerful and varying prose styles of the novel, and finally in a set of themes that reflect traditional American values. Moreover, in several of these aspects of the novel, Steinbeck drew on Biblical and religious materials that add to the richness and depth of the book.

The novel's ability to catch and keep the reader's interest owes much to its characters, whom Steinbeck has endowed with vitality and thematic significance. Many readers have seen embodiments of basic Christian virtues in such characters as Ma Joad, Tom Joad, Jim Casy, and Rose of Sharon. Ma Joad has seemed to many readers to be among the few believable saints in American literature. Tom Joad's growth in insight illustrates one of the important themes in the novel. Whether Tom or Jim Casy best illustrates a Christ figure depends on the reader's interpretation of the novel; each character has seemed to some readers to be illustrative of Christ's self-sacrificial life.

The structure of the novel is based on the Joad's journey westward. The journey gives the novel a mythical quality and achieves emotional power by relating the Joad's journey to that of many previous journeys, including the exodus of the Hebrew people out of Egypt to the promised land as well as westward journeys of the American Western myth. The ironic differences between the promised land found by the Hebrews in Palestine and the tragic plight of the Joads in California is not lost on the reader.

Steinbeck's use of a series of interludes as he tells the story of the Joads is an effective method of relating the particularities of the Joad family to a more universal set of realities. There are sixteen of these interchapters; these do not refer to the Joads, Wilsons, or Wainwrights. Instead, Steinbeck uses these chapters to tell of the larger significance of the situation in which the Joads find themselves. The interchapters draw on the material which Steinbeck had found in his visits to the migrant camps and his observations of the general situation of drouth and depression.

Several of the memorable features of the novel appear in these interchapters, the turtle in chapter three, the tractor episode in chapter five, in which an old farmhouse is destroyed by an enormous tractor. The farmer stands helplessly by with a rifle.

The observation that nature imitates art, that life is often parallel to great works of literature, is illustrated by the tragic, recent event in Minnesota in which a farmer, dispossessed of his farm by the bank that owned the mortgage, shot and killed two officials of the bank, then later killed himself. Would that farmer have committed such a violent and useless act if he had read and thought about The Grapes of Wrath?

Chapter eleven describes a vacant house, symbolic of the many vacant houses left across the deserted rural landscape. In other interchapters, Steinbeck discusses land ownership in California, the development of the migratory labor situation, and the accompanying results for society. In the final interchapter Steinbeck describes the rain which sets the scene for the last chapter of the book with its poignant episode of Rose of Sharon feeding the starving old man.

While some readers have felt that scene unrealistic, others have seen in it a poetic, or mythical, or metaphorical effort to realize several themes of the book— especially the traditional Western world theme of the essential oneness of the humankind. Rose of Sharon cannot save her own baby, but she can still serve as one who ameliorates suffering and demonstrates the ennobling possibilities for humanity, in even the worst of situations.

The varying prose styles add to the strength of the book. Peter Lisca has shown how the prose has a Biblical ring in several places, for example in the passage comparing horses and tractors. Lisca makes this clear by printing the passage in the style of the Psalms:

> The tractor had lights shining,
> For there is no day and night for a tractor
> And the disks turn the earth in the darkness
> And they glitter in the daylight.
>
> And when a horse stops work and goes in the barn
> There is a life and vitality left,
> There is a breathing and a warmth,
> And the feet shift on the straw,
> And the jaws champ on the hay,
> And the ears and eyes are alive.
> There is a warmth of life in the barn,
> And the heat and smell of life.
>
> But when the motor of a tractor stops,
> It is as dead as the ore it came from.
> The heat goes out of it
> Like the living heat that leaves a corpse.[1]

In a different style, Steinbeck describes a folk dance in chapter thirteen; "Look at that Texas boy. Long legs loose, taps four times for every damn step. Never see a boy swing aroun' like that. Look at him swing that Cherokee girl, red in the cheeks and her toe points out." Throughout the novel the prose style varies to fit the subject under consideration. Lisca illustrates this point further by reference to chapter seven in which there is a description of the sale of used cars: "Cadillacs, LaSalles, Buicks, Plymouths, Packards, Chevvies, Fords, Pontiacs. Row on row. Headlight glinting in the afternoon sun. Good Used Cars. Soften 'em up, Joe. Jesus I wisht I had a thousand jalopies. Get 'em ready to deal, and I'll close 'em."[2]

Steinbeck's use of symbols in the novel is another of the ways in which the Joads' predicament is shown to extend their own limited situation. These include the turtle, the vacant houses, the enormous tractor, the worn out automobiles, Rose of Sharon nursing the old starving man, the grapes, both in the title and throughout the novel as a symbol of plenty and as ironic counterpoint of the denial of plenty to the Joads, Rose of Sharon's stillborn child, set adrift to float down the stream, again in ironic counterpoint to the child Moses in the Bible, who became a saviour of his people. The Joads' journey is itself an archetype of mass migration, as Lisca suggests. These symbolic objects or actions are carefully integrated into the action of the novel, contributing to the artistic success of the whole book.

Symbolic contrasts between animals and machines appear frequently in the book. Generally, the animal references stand for life and the references to machinery stand for depersonalized, inanimate ways of dealing with human problems. "I lost my land, a single tractor took my land." The phrase "tractored out" or "tractored off" appears often. Some animal references are derogatory, as when human beings behave like ants, or fight like a couple of cats. But generally, as in the contrast between horses and tractors quoted above, animal references are hopeful and positive; mechanical references suggest the destructive and negative aspects of contemporary life. The turtle, for example, symbolizes the persistence of living beings in spite of danger or hardship. As machines threaten the turtle, so machines threaten the farmer. As the turtle persists, so will the Joads.

The thematic structure of the book is a major source of its continuing power. In the decades since its publication readers have seen a number of traditional American ideas that complement each other in the texture of the book. While some critics have seen tension in the ideas of the book, on the whole most readers have seen artistic integrity in the book's thematic structure.

Frederick Ives Carpenter suggested, not long after the book's publication, that a number of the most characteristic American ideas appeared in the book—"the mystical transcendentalism of Emerson," "the earthy democracy of Walt Whitman," the "pragmatic instrumentalism of William James and John Dewey." [3] Other readers have seen in the book the agrarian philosophy of Thomas Jefferson—a faith in the small farm that has strongly influenced our society. It was agrarianism that led to the homestead laws passed by the Republican Party when Abraham Lincoln was president, and that lay back of a variety of twentieth century efforts to assist farmers and protect the family farm.

No feature of the book is better illustrative of the tendency of the American novel to protest the conflict between American ideals and American practice than the novel's agrarianism. The Joads have as a major motivation their desire to own a piece of land, where they can raise the grapes of plenty, enough so that Pa Joad can squash the grapes across his face and feel the juice run down his chin, a destiny he is not to achieve.

The essential reality of the Joad's predicament is demonstrated by the fact that between 1940 and 1980 the number of American farms declined from 6 million to 2¼ million. Millions of Americans in that period left their farms for life elsewhere, as the Joads left their Oklahoma home. That migration of millions of people from rural areas to the city affected the United States in many ways—increasing crime and welfare on the one hand, and providing a ready force of factory workers on the other. Few people note that, as the novel implies, we pay for our food not only at the grocery store, but also in taxes caused by crime and welfare.

It is an ironic possiblility that if all the political and editorial language calling for the preservation of the family farm were printed in a single set of volumes, it might exceed the attacks on The Grapes of Wrath. But it is doubtful that any other American novelist has so vigorously upheld the ideal of the American family farm or so artistically protested the failure of our society to make that ideal possible in reality.

The transcendentalism in the book has led to two groundless charges by the critics, first that the book is atheistic, as expressed in the ideas of Jim Casy, and second that the book is collectivist, a code word meaning sympathetic to communism. These misreadings of the book grow out of an ignorance of transcendentalism, and a misinterpretation of the call for unified action presented by the book.

The concept of the oversoul, in Emerson and in this book, is an affirmation of the universal presence of deity in all aspects of life. Emerson coined the term "oversoul" to express his understanding of the Christian tradition as he learned it from many Puritan sermons as well as from his reading of Luther, Calvin, Milton, and other theologians, as the literary historian Perry Miller has shown. Though Jim Casy probably had not read any works of theology, he does express the transcendental concept of the oversoul several times in the book in such language as this: "Maybe all men got one big soul ever' body's a part of." Transcendentalism has been criticized for its vagueness, but rightly or wrongly, it is an effort to assert that spritual values are present in, and ultimately control, the material reality of the visible universe. It was clearly not the intent of Emerson nor of Jim Casy to deny the existence of deity. The charge of atheism is often made by those who say, "If you don't accept my definition of God, you must be an atheist." Neither Emerson nor Jim Casy would have agreed that they were atheists.

In fact the four major characters, Ma Joad, Tom, Jim Casy, and Rose of Sharon represent Steinbeck's effort to dramatize Biblical and Christian values in a realistic way among an unlikely group of poor and deprived persons. Ma Joad is one of the few saints in American literature. The qualities of saintliness—a cheerful and self-sacrificial life, and an understanding and consistent love for others—are realistically embodied in this portrait of a poverty stricken Oklahoma farm wife. Ma Joad's family disintegrates, her few possessions are lost, and she finds herself on the brink of starvation. Yet she does not fall into despair or bitterness but continues to respond in a helpful and life affirming way not only to the members of her own family but also to hungry neighbor children and a starving, unknown man. Ma Joad is a vivid dramatization of the "love that passeth understanding." It is hard to imagine what a truly saintly life would be like in the twentieth century. Steinbeck's imagination has given us a believable picture of a saint from an unlikely source—an Okie, an uneducated, migrant fruit picker, driven from her home to wander the land in search of a place to live.

Tom Joad illustrates the Biblical theme of growth, the Biblical assertion that the good life requires continued rebirth. Furthermore, Tom illustrates the Biblical notion that even the most unpromising persons have the possibility of a new life. Tom comes out of prison an unchanged person, selfishly individualistic, primarily interested in sex and drinking, though he does have a strong love for his family. But the events that follow, and the influence of his mother and of Jim Casy, greatly change him.

As the Joads experience the loss of their land, the breaking up of the family, near starvation, brutal treatment by police and landlords, and the death of Jim Casy, Tom grows in "wisdom and stature" to quote the Biblical phrase. When Ma Joad told Tom, "You're spoke for.." she contributed to his growth. When Jim Casy spoke of the Oversoul, Tom listened and grew out of his selfish concerns with his own satisfactions. He became aware, as his mother made clear to him, that he had to be concerned, not only for his own family's welfare, but for the welfare of all families, that the death of his sister's child was loss to all families, that the birth of a healthy child was cause for celebration by all families. He became quite willing to work for other families, even if it cost him his life, as it had cost the life of Jim Casy.

When Tom told his mother goodbye, as he set out to carry on the mission that he had learned from Jim Casy, she spoke with sorrow, "How 'm I gonna know about you? They might kill ya an' I wouldn't know." But Tom tells her it doesn't matter. He explained in terms of the lesson he had learned from Casy of the Oversoul, of which all human beings are a part. Though we appear to be isolated individuals, still there is a transcendental unity that joins us:

> I'll be all aroun' in the dark. I'll be ever'where—wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an'—I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build—why I'll be there. See?[4]

Though the dialect is lower class Okie, the ideas are derived from the Gospel of John.

Some would-be censors have mistakenly asserted that Steinbeck is sympathetic to communism. Steinbeck was in fact rather conservative; he supported the war in Vietnam, for example. His insistence in several works of fiction on the right of each person to his own piece of land can hardly be reconciled with communist tendencies toward collectivist forms of agriculture. However, Steinbeck's views outside the book are irrelevant to the implications of the symbols and actions in the book. It is clearly wrong to judge a book by the actual or assumed characteristics of the author.

The call for united action which runs through the book is not to be identified with the term "collectivist" as a synonym for communist. There is a tension between the individual and the group in the book, but its reconciliation is in the traditional Western world notion of the oneness of the humankind, as for example in the famous passage from John Donne, "Never send to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee."

The book calls for unifed action that will preserve the right of farmers to their own farm, that will provide food for the hungry, that will subordinate the machine to the needs of the garden and to the needs of the human beings who toil in the garden. The book's call for unified action to meet the disasters of the 1930's is no more collectivist than was the action of the colonists who dumped the tea in Boston Harbor or who took up arms at Concord to fight the redcoats. There are many illustrations in the book of the need and ability of ordinary citizens to work together in solving problems, as for example when the migrants helped each other on the journey, or maintained order in the camp. This aspect of the novel is typical of American pragmatism—not of Marxist ideas.

In the original meaning of the word, a classic is a book taught in the classroom. Steinbeck's book is certainly a classic in this sense of the word. As with a number of other classics, it is likely that many people read this book in high school. This use is appropriate because the book lends itself well to studying many aspects of American literature and life. The Grapes of Wrath won a Pulitzer prize in 1940 and is one of the major works of an American novelist who won the Nobel prize in 1962. It is difficult to understand how any American high school or college could forbid the teaching or use of the book while maintaining a claim to act as a proper agency for the education of the young in this democratic republic.

Readers who wish to explore further the rich body of commentary that the novel has stimulated might find some of the following books in their library.

Davis, Robert C., ed., Twentieth Century Interpretations of the Grapes of Wrath: A Collection of Critical Essays, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982.

Davis, Robert Murray, ed., Steinbeck, A Collection of Critical Essays, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972.

Donohue, Agnes McNeill, A Casebook on The Grapes of Wrath, New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, Inc., 1968.

French, Warren, ed., A Companion to The Grapes of Wrath, New York, Viking Press, 1963.

French, Warren, John Steinbeck, Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1975.

Lisca, Peter, The Wide World of John Steinbeck, New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1958.

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[1] "The Grapes of Wrath as Fiction," from A Case Book on The Grapes of Wrath, ed., A. M. Donohue, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968, p. 175.

[2] Ibid., p. 176.

[3] "The Philosophical Joads" in A Case Book on The Grapes of Wrath, ed., A. M. Donohue, 1968, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, p. 81.

[4] The Grapes of Wrath, Viking Press, 1939, p. 572.

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A Hero Ain't Nothing But a Sandwich*

A Rationale for Classroom Use

Why does Benjie Johnson use dope? His immediate family is distressed by it, and so are the two best teachers he's encountered as well as his closest friend, Jimmy-Lee. In contrast to the conviction of everyone who knows him, Benjie himself does not admit that he has a drug habit. He further thinks of himself as basically honest, stealing only on occasion from his relatives (and that with the optimistic intention of repaying them even before they notice that anything is missing).

Life has turned sour for Benjie at age thirteen. When he was six, seven, and eight, he and his mother had really good times—going out for ice cream, reading the funnies, watching TV. Even his grandmother, with whom they lived, was easy to get along with. But then Butler Craig moved in with them, replacing Benjie in his mother's affections and ending the enjoyable twosome they had been. Benjie blames himself for the missing father he has never seen: "Musta gone cause he didn't dig me." He is bored at home and especially so at school, where he comes to believe that teachers are actually phonies, whether white or Black. He feels particularly betrayed by Nigeria Greene, a fellow Black, who together with another teacher, Bernard Cohen, gets the principal to sign the papers hospitalizing him for detoxification. After this treatment, he is released to home care where all try to be, and indeed are, supportive. Benjie, however, decides to get one more fix (to remember what it is he's giving up!), searches the rooms fruitlessly for money and finally makes off with Butler's best suit and overcoat.

Shortly thereafter, the climactic episode of the novel takes place. Butler surprises Benjie stealing a toaster from a neighboring apartment into which he moved, and, infuriated with Benjie, chases him to the icy roof top of their building. Benjie slips near the ledge and almost plummets to the pavement below before Butler manages to grab him with one hand. "Let me die," Benjie yells, and Butler—their eyes locked on each other— realizes a fundamental truth about himself in their relationship: "I was runnin' from him...cause he wasn't mine." The rescue enables Benjie finally to see Butler in a new light: He even calls him Dad. In the closing scene, open-ended, Butler is anxiously waiting for Benjie to show up for continued treatment at the drug rehabilitation center.

Young readers can learn much about the literary form of fiction—and about life—from the masterful crafting of this novel. Four areas are particularly suitable for further exploration: point of view, characterization, language, and themes.

Point of view: The twenty-three relatively short chapters are each told from the point of view of the different characters that inhabit this realistic inner city setting painted by Childress, in effect a mosaic that gradually presents a sharp portrait of how the problems of one young man affect the intricate relationships of those who care about him. A simple count of chapter headings shows who the main protagonists are: Benjie has seven chapters, Butler has four, and all of the others have either one or two. As the characters share their perspectives on the events in the unfolding story, and on one another, readers find themselves engaged in two kinds of responses: the more immediate one involves the constant need to reappraise each character, but especially that of Benjie, as new information is provided; the other response, cumulatively building up, is to be drawn more deeply into the structure of this remarkable family.

Characterization: There are no stereotypes in the characters Childress has created here. The emotions are real, their economic and social situations are depicted convincingly, and their previous backgrounds (in a then still strongly racist South) are briefly but tellingly capsuled. Even a very minor character, Walter the pusher, can rail against the very junkies whom he supplies but actually despises, seeing himself as no worse than a salesman who has a business to operate. With the main character Benjie it becomes clear quite soon how ambivalent his feelings toward Butler are. He admires Butler, who's cool and self-assured, most notably with the social workers that have to be dealt with. At the same time Benjie resents him, blaming him for the lessened role he now perceives to be his with his mother.

Rose Johnson, his mother, also experiences conflicting emotions: the three people she loves—her mother, her common-law husband, and her son—create demands on her that are becoming oppressive. Eventually she explodes at Butler, critical of her for taking Benjie to a fortune teller:

> Dammit,...Kill me! Why don't you and Benjie buy guns and shoot me through the heart! His father could run, you can run, he can run, even my mother can slam her door; but I got to hold my ground and keep a roof over our heads, clean house, put food on the table, and also hit it on out here to work each and every day. Dammit, get offa me! (119-120)

But she does not succumb to despair; her love for them is too strong. After a brief retreat to her room, she returns to offer them a piece of pie and milk. As Benjie's narration concludes: "She smilin' like nothin' happen." (121)

Butler—steady, compassionate, strong—provides the salvaging link that binds this family together. He has finally won the admiration of Benjie, who now calls him Dad purposely and with pride. He has earned the respect of Benjie's grandmother, whose dancing of the shimmy is the final sign of approbation for Butler and what he has meant to them. What he has provided them is stability and protection—and in heroic measure. One of the social workers involved in rehabilitating Benjie had told Butler that he needed to identify with some male figures, proceeding then to list books on Black history as well as urging him to take Benjie to see movie stars and sports figures. Butler's common-sense understanding of the real world leads him to put things straight for the social worker:

> Some these big-time, celebrity-high-lifers can't take care-a themselves, they in as much trouble as you and Benjie. Yall gotta learn to identify with me, who gotta get up to face the world every damn mornin' with a clear head and a heavy heart. Benjie once told me a hero ain't nothin' but a sandwich—and you say a hero is a celebrity! Listen to my credentials; then maybe yall can pin me on a hero button. I'm supportin' three adults, one chile, and the United States government on my salary...and can't claim any of em for tax exemptions. So, explain me no heroes. Yeah, and some-a our neighborhood success stories are livin' offa Benjie's veins, while they ridin' round in limousines and grandstandin' to win everybody's admiration! (126)

Language: As the excerpts reveal, the language used in the novel is a variety of Black English, certainly not the language by which the general commerce of our society is conducted. But it is vital, forceful, and essential: it has the bite that stimulates other characters to action or important self discovery. Shortly after Benjie stole Butler's best suit and overcoat, Butler moved out of the apartment to a neighboring one. Mrs. Ransom Bell, the grandmother, castigates Butler for this move:

> "You ran out on Rose. Men are good for nothin' but runnin'. Some these colored men ain't nothin' but breath, britches, and shoe leather! When trouble comes, you run! I told Rosey to keep a sharp eye on the kinda man who runs when trouble comes." (105)

Memorable in its style and impact, this message comes back to gnaw at Butler in the roof-top scene where he realizes that indeed he has been running from Benjie.

Many street terms for drugs are used throughout the book and there are occasional instances of profanity woven into the dialogue. Both these instances are well motivated for depicting the ugly side of the real life that confronts modern urban youth. Sanitized language would in fact detract from the realistic, but not overly grim, setting created by Childress. Benjie has drifted into a drug mess and dragged his family in with him: there's no "pretty" way to describe this ugly situation. Nor are most of the vivid metaphors used in the novel objectionable. Examples abound that are forceful, inventive, and memorable: "walkin' with short bread" for short of cash; "bespoke suit" for tailor made; "It's nation time!" Nigeria Greene's rallying cry for his students; and Benjie's description of the boring way his geography class is taught: "If I was to pick out middle C on the piano and keep hittin' it..."

A useful exercise for readers to undertake would be to explore the language styles as they vary from character to character. They would come to appreciate in general the edited American English form in the presentations by Nigeria Greene, Bernard Cohen, and the principal contrasted with the variety of the Black dialect styles used by the other characters. Within the Black dialect varieties—none of which poses any real problems of intelligibility—it would be instructive for students to search out the differences in style between adult and youth and between male and female. This kind of inquiry would enable students to more fully assess the novelistic techniques of Alice Childress, and it might further serve to alert them to such possibilities in their own writing.

Themes: There are two major themes in this novel. Focusing on Benjie, one theme deals with his drug problem and raises this question: Can family love and support overcome the perceived alienation of a troubled teenager? An optimistic answer would be a positive one—and there are grounds for it in the novel—but the question remains an open one at the very end: in the book, as in life. The other theme focuses on Butler's role and deals with the theme foreshadowed in the very title. Whereas the title is a pun on the definition of a hero, the novel itself explores in rich detail the substantive attributes of what constitutes a real-life hero. A hero is not the sandwich, as in Benjie's taunt, nor the celebrity figure that the social worker wants Benjie exposed to: it is the person who regularly meets the daily responsibilities thrust upon him or her, regardless of the difficulties they impose, and even when no credit is granted for doing so. Individual responsibility is a highly prized value in Butler's view of reality. At one point, for example, Benjie says he can drop the habit if somebody believed in him. Butler's response is sharp and to the point:

> "Dammit, Benjie,...you gotta do it even if nobody believe in you, gotta be your own man, the supervisor of your veins, the night watchman and day shift foreman in charge-a your own affairs." (120)

Childress has surrounded Benjie with three important environments in order to deal with these two major themes in her novel: the home, the school, and "the society," the latter term assuming ironic proportions when it depicts Nigeria Greene's gradual disillusionment with the Black movement. To the extent that each of us is what others perceive us to be, the interaction in each of these settings helps to determine for us what kind of person Benjie is. These environments are also important in permitting Childress to deal with a rich array of sub-themes and topics, ones that young readers will find stimulating. In the home environment, in addition to individual responsibility and the nature of the hero, students can explore communication as a sub-theme. How would students explain this dilemma of Benjie's mother, for example:

> One day I almost said it...after goin' over the words in my mind, "Benjie, the greatest thing in the world is to love someone and they love you too." But when I opened by mouth, I said, "Benjie, brush the crumbs off your jacket." (54)

Or how would they contrast Butler's advice to Benjie that he be his own man with Nigeria's father's suggestion that he give back the lie? The family values in Benjie's household, which consists of three generations, are also worth discussing and writing about. The grandmother's views on the process of aging might be revealing to young readers.

The school environment takes up topics of immediate concern to most students: fair teachers, boring classes, vandalism, school cafeteria food, unfair teachers. In the society at large, the poverty cycle, the role of social agencies, racism, drug addiction—all are legitimate and provocative topics for exploration in the reading of this novel.

Why should students read this novel, finally, given that it is about drug addiction and that the language is not standard English and is occasionally vulgar? The reasons for doing so are compelling. It is an optimistic, even humorous, book. It is skillfully crafted. It is realistic without being grim. But, more important, it presents a Black family with a strong commitment to individual responsibility, a family that is warm and caring. It's a novel that depicts a striking array of Blacks—from the mean and radical to the professional and saintly. And the drugs (and their users) are depicted as offensive and trouble-causing; they are not made to appear attractive.

*Citations are taken from the Avon paperback, October, 1974.

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If Beale Street Could Talk
A Rationale for Classroom Use

If Beale Street Could Talk, it would tell, moving successfully backward and forward in time, an age old story of love that survives adversity, of enduring personal relationships that defeat cruelty and indifference, of human values that transcend both race and culture.

THE STORY

Nineteen-year-old Tish, the novel's principal voice, begins her story by telling the readers that she had, that day, visited her twenty-two-year-old fiance, Fonny, in prison, partly to tell him that she was pregnant. During the next several months, as the novel unfolds, Tish shares current happenings and introspective feelings about herself, the people she loves, and the cruelty of a social system that demeans minorities. Throughout, she interweaves enough of her childhood and young adulthood that the picture is complete.

Fonny and Tish have been friends since childhood. Although their families lived across the street in those days, the children had relatively little to do with each other until they became involved in a fight. When Tish hits Fonny with a stick that has a nail in it and draws blood, the fight ends abruptly. Sure that he'll die of lockjaw and that she'll spend the rest of her life in jail, Tish spends several miserable days. Then, Fonny appears on her stoop with a doughnut and an apology, and friendship begins.

As Tish illustrates her childhood, she establishes the characteristics of members of both her family and Fonny's. Readers learn that Fonny and his father, Frank, have a warm, loving relationship but that the relationships between Frank and his wife and daughters and between Fonny and his sisters are much less cordial. On the other hand, the love in Tish's home is strongly visible, made apparent to readers by Tish's telling of the way her parents met and then shifting to the present and the announcement of her pregnancy.

Tish's parents and sister assure Tish of their love and support. They know that Tish and Fonny's plans to marry ended abruptly when Fonny was falsely accused of raping a Puerto Rican woman and sent to prison. And from having watched the youngsters grow up together, they accept a union of faith if not of fact. Their concern now is for Tish and her unborn child—and for Fonny who must somehow be rescued from confinement. Their approach is to invite Fonny's family over for a drink so that the two families might plan their strategy together.

But the best laid plans . . . Fonny's family, never on the best of terms, quarrel openly and insult Tish. Tish's announcement causes Fonny's mother to curse the mother and her unborn child yet cry that her son would be forgiven for this "lustful action." Fonny's father strikes his wife with the back of his hand, knocking her to the floor. Then, the two men leave. The women become more and more verbally abusive; and when Fonny's mother and sisters leave, any hope of two-family solidarity has been shattered.

The attempts to gain Fonny's release seem doomed. The white lawyer wants more money. The policeman who arrested Fonny is a white racist. The only witness for Fonny—besides Tish, whose testimony will be disregarded—has been arrested and is being held incommunicado. The victim has disappeared.

Yet, there is hope. Angered by the injustice and the callousness of the system and driven by his own pride, the lawyer becomes more interested and more involved. He finally locates the victim in Puerto Rico, but someone will have to go there to see her. The lawyer can't go because he needs to stay on top of the local situation and because he must avoid being accused of intimidating a witness. Tish can't go because, without her, Fonny will panic. Tish's sister, Ernestine, can't go because she has to keep applying pressure on the lawyer. Neither father can go for obvious reasons. That leaves Tish's mother, Sharon, who fears planes and dreads leaving New York but who will go because she must.

Sharon meets the victim but runs into a blank wall. The fathers' attempts to make additional money for bail have been only partly successful. Fonny's mother and sisters aid the prosecution's case by saying that Fonny has always been incorrigible.

And the novel ends with the suicide of Fonny's father, the birth of Tish's baby, and the hope that bail money has been raised. In the unending cycle of life, there is birth as well as death; in the midst of despair, there is light and hope. The will to survive triumphs, and love and caring create the bond that transcends race or culture or creed.

THE STORY'S VALUE

Objections to Baldwin's novel may arise from several sources. The language is straightforward, often profane, and the tone is frequently bitter. Sexual scenes, while neither frequent nor titillating, are specific. Orthodox religion is treated lightly. The social system, dominated by the white man, is decried by Hispanics, Puerto Ricans and blacks—even by the poor Italians who also find themselves at the mercy of the establishment.

Overall, though, the values should outweigh the objections. However profane, the language is realistic. Tish and Fonny are children of the streets; the families, their friends, and their enemies are all caught in a ghetto environment. Tish, as narrator, uses common four-letter words for bodily functions and sexual parts and activities. When she relates a story from a different perspective, she retains the vernacular. Although the words may not please the readers, such words are commonly used and understood, even by the naive. And to divest the characters of their natural speech patterns would destroy the story because it would destroy the character's credibility. Unless the characters are allowed to tell their story in their own way, the novel is neither realistic nor meaningful.

Baldwin's tone is bitter. He speaks of those who prey on the poor: "The poor are always crossing the Sahara. And the lawyers and bondsmen and all that crowd circle around the poor, exactly like vultures. . . , scavengers, indecent garbage men. . ." (p. 7) He says of the environment: ". . .New York must be the ugliest and the dirtiest city in the world. It must have the ugliest buildings and the nastiest people. It's got to have the worst cops. If any place is worse, it's got to be so close to hell that you can smell the people frying. And, come to think of it, that's exactly the smell of New York in the summertime." (p. 10) He speaks of the attitude of the poor: The Italian lady says, "I have been in America a long time. I hope I do not die here." (p. 151) Through Fonny he describes the system: "They got us in a trick bag, baby. It's hard, but I just want for you to bear in mind that they can make us lose each other by putting me in the shit—or, they can try to make us lose each other by making you try to protect me from it. You see what I mean?" (p. 153)

Readers might anticipate that minority spokemen would be cynically outspoken about a system that had, historically, done them few favors. And reviewer Arthur Curley (Library Journal, April 1, 1974, p. 1056) comments: ". . .as a social document, this moving novel is a powerful assault upon the cynicism which seems today to drain our determination to confront deep social problems." And further: "The balance of bitterness and love which we associate with Baldwin's writings appears to have shifted in favor of the latter. Some may see this as a symptom of weariness; more likely, it signifies the evolution of anger into a deeper passion." (p. 1056)

Tish's initial sexual experience is quite detailed; at the same time, the experience is encompassed by an emotional closeness and a gentleness between Tish and Fonny that creates an openness and cements a bond that they have shared since they were children. Passion exists, but so does loves—and love endures. Other sexual scenes are heightened by understatement when Tish identifies the night the baby was conceived, by a kind of wry humor when Fonny describes for Tish his parents' love-making ritual, and by a sense of isolation and loneliness that leads Fonny to masturbate in his prison cell. In no case are the readers seduced into any kind of sexual gratification.

On the other hand, to deny the sexual implications would be to deny the novel's base. After all, Tish is pregnant and Fonny has been imprisoned because a woman has accused him of raping her. One of the primary urgencies of the novel is to gain a father's release from prison so that he might care for his family. The relationship between the cops and the blacks often carries sexual connotations, but generations of stories have established a precedent for depicting that kind of relationship. There is comment about rape and attempted rape in prison, but again, to include such statements is to include reality.

And, finally, there may be an objection to the way religion is treated. Fonny's mother is Sanctified, but all of the characters—except, perhaps, her daughters—believe that her soul is never truly touched, that her devotion is superficial and hypocritical. The sexual scene between Fonny's parents, as Fonny describes it, is irreverent. Tish comments that her family is Baptist, but orthodox religion has little to do with their lives. Still, the novel is deeply religious. Part One is entitled, "Troubled About My Soul"; Part Two, "Zion." The love and loyalty and willingness to sacrifice for each other reach to the very depths of religion. In true Biblical fashion Tish assures Fonny that where he goes, she will follow. And Joseph, as the father figure, cares for his family and provides for them.

Those who would condemn the novel can undoubtedly find sufficient grounds. But the novel deserves a place on library shelves and it deserves reading. If Beale Street Could Talk portrays a strong family balanced not only by love but by equality. Each member of Tish's family—father, mother, older sister—has equal voice in family council and an equal role in solving the problems. There is no matriarchy here, nor is there a male dominated household. There is, instead a united family. And that family fights for survival against incredible odds—and succeeds!

Neither is it a one-sided novel. The white lawyer becomes increasingly an advocate for—and perhaps even a friend of—the family. The relationship between Fonny and Tish and their Spanish friends is sensitively drawn. When Sharon goes to Puerto Rico to confront the victim, she is befriended by a young native taxi driver who recognizes both the legion of motherhood and the fact that Sharon is a lady. Sharon and her family realize and appreciate the plight of the Puerto Rican victim; and while the readers might wish that she would change her story, they, too, can appreciate the trauma the victim has undergone and understand why she will not—cannot—change her testimony.

All of us can only grow from reading about and trying to understand cultures beyond our own. And we can profit by learning that beneath the surface, all human beings are compelled by the same needs and desires, are driven by the same passions and fears, and are comforted by love—the final answer.

If Beale Street Could Talk, it would tell a compelling story. And, through James Baldwin, it does.

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I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou

Awareness of Displacement: A Reader's Rationale

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings is the first in a four-book autobiography of famed black dancer, singer, writer, director and civil rights activist Maya Angelou.[1] This initial work recounts her childhood and adolescence, the divorce of her parents when she is three, the move from one part of the country to another, from one relative to another, and ends at age sixteen with the birth of an illegitimate son. It is not a pretty story. But is is a true one, told with humor, style, energy, and most of all compassion and understanding.

Adults who appoint themselves guardians of society's morals, however, will find much in Caged Bird that offends. The sex scenes are explicit, the characters portrayed from the point of view of a painfully honest child, and the descriptions of religious people and services hilariously irreverent or pathetically sad. Since it is in white communities where Angelou's work may cause trouble, the focus here will be on the value for those students whose backgrounds differ considerably from the biographer's. What will they gain from reading this book they might otherwise miss?

DETERMINATION AND STRENGTH

First of all, Caged Bird is about survival and hope. For those students who live in poverty-stricken environments and broken families or lack control over their lives, the author is a real-life role model. By sheer determination she overcame low self-esteem, economic deprivation, and societal obstacles to reach the heights of artistic success.

In adulthood Angelou toured Europe and Africa in Porgy and Bess. She produced, directed and starred in Cabaret for Freedom, wrote the screen play and musical score of the film Georgia, Georgia, wrote and produced a ten-part TV series on African traditions in America, and wrote the TV screenplays for I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings and The Sisters. At the request of Martin Luther King Jr., she was appointed Northern Coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and has since received numerous honorary degrees and national awards.

Little in this first book foreshadows the later blossoming of the author's remarkable talent—only an eager mind (she read The Tale of Two Cities at age eight), strong will, and a budding interest in dance. Knowing about Angelou's troubled beginnings should appeal to adolescents in need of confidence and motivation and explain the origins of her strengths:

> The Black female is assaulted in her tender years by all the common forces of nature at the same time that she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power.
>
> The fact that the adult American Negro female emerges a formidable character is often met with amazement, distaste, and even belligerence. It is seldom accepted as an inevitable outcome of the struggle won by survivors and deserves respect if not enthusiastic acceptance. (p. 265)[2]

PREJUDICE AND PRIDE

Second, privileged white students can learn how it feels to live as a black in a racially bigoted world. At age three the author, born Marguerite Johnson (and nicknamed Maya), was sent with her year-older brother to live with their grandmother who owned a general store in Stamps, Arkansas. There they experienced the degradations reserved for blacks in segregated Southern towns (though bigotry was certainly not limited to the South).

Blacks had separate drinking fountains and restrooms and sat in the back seats on buses and in the balcony at movies. Maya found offensive the black maids in films who chirped "Lawsy, missy" to their rich employers and the chauffeurs who rolled their eyes and scratched their heads. "I wondered," says the author drily, "how on earth an idiot like that could be trusted with her beautiful cars." (p. 115) What her people most envied about whites was their wealth. They had so many clothes they could afford to give away old ones that were worn just a little under the arms. "I couldn't understand whites and where they got the right to spend money so lavishly." (p. 48)

At age ten Maya was hired to work in a white woman's kitchen. Too lazy to say "Marguerite," the employer insisted on calling her "Mary." Not using black people's names was a dangerous practice, Angelou notes, because of centuries of being called "niggers, jigs, dinges, blackbirds, crows, boots, and spooks." (p. 106) The child got her revenge. She "accidentally" dropped the woman's prized family dishes.

There was no black dentist in Stamps. One day Maya was rushed in pain to a local white dentist who had borrowed money from Maya's grandmother during the Depression. He refused to help. When reminded of his debt, he barked, "I'd rather stick my hand in a dog's mouth than in a nigger's." (p. 184) Maya had to take the twenty-five mile bus ride to Texarkana.

Atrocities against blacks were frequent occurrences. When word got out that a black man had "messed with" a white woman, the children helped their grandmother hide innocent, crippled Uncle Willie from avenging Klan members by putting him in the potato and onion bin and covering him "like a casserole." After Joe Louis beat a white contender to remain heavyweight champion of the world, blacks banded together for fear of retaliation from white townsmen.

The children's ten-year Southern stay ended abruptly when Maya's brother witnessed a dead black man fished out of a pond and white men joking about it. Their grandmother hurried them back to California to live with their mother.

> "The Black woman in the South who raises sons, grandsons, and nephews had her heartstrings tied to a hanging noose. Any break from routine may herald for them unbearable news." (p. 110)

Maya was an honor student in Arkansas, but the school she attended, unlike the white one, had no lawn, hedges, tennis court, or climbing ivy. It had two buildings and a poorly educated staff. The girl stood proudly at her eighth grade commencement, only to be humiliated by the white male speaker who read dully and condescendingly from his papers.

> We were maids and farmers, handymen and washerwomen, and anything higher that we aspired to was farcical and presumptuous. . . It was awful to be Negro and have no control over my life. It was brutal to be young and already trained to sit quietly and listen to charges brought against my color with no chance of defense. . .the world didn't think we had minds, and they let us know it. (p. 175-77)

HISTORICAL INSIGHTS

Third, students can learn about some effects on minorities of the Depression and World War Two. The Depression hit hard in the South like everywhere, but "it seeped into the black area slowly, like a thief with misgivings." (p. 49) With poverty already an everyday reality, there was little for blacks to lose. "Their wages wouldn't even get them out of debt to my grandmother, not to mention the staggering bill that waited on them at the white commissary downtown." (p. 9) Not until two years had passed, when payments to cotton pickers dropped from ten cents a pound to five, did the black community realize "that the Depression, at least, did not discriminate." (p. 49)

War plants were in full swing in San Francisco when Maya moved into an area left vacant by the interned Japanese-Americans. One would expect, she writes, that the newly arrived Southern blacks would sympathize with the Japanese. But they did not. They were blinded by steady paychecks and apartment houses, by taxis and restaurants. "Who could expect this man to share his new and dizzying importance with concern for a race that he had never known to exist? . . . The Japanese were not white folks . . . since they didn't have to be feared, neither did they have to be considered." (p. 205)

To the blacks' dismay, they found that bigotry also thrived in California. "Southern white illiterates" brought their biases intact and blacks retained their fear and distrust. For the first time the races worked side-by-side and "animosities festered and opened like boils on the face of the city." (p. 207)

CULTURAL VALUES

A fourth contribution this book can have for white students is the encouragement to read with an open-minded tolerance for differing values. Because of a long history of oppression, ghetto black, especially, developed ethical behaviors that sometimes conflicted with middle-class norms.

Angelou gives the reader samples of these differences. She explains, but she does not judge or apologize. "Stories of law violations," for instance, "are weighed on a different set of scales in the black mind than in the white." The feeling among many blacks is: "We are the victims of the world's most comprehensive robbery. Life demands a balance. It's all right if we do a little robbing now." (p. 218-19) The surprising thing, she says, is that more blacks do not rob banks, embezzle funds, or engage in graft.

The author comments on the phenomenon whites often find amusing—those who live in hovels, yet buy flashy, expensive cars and clothes. "In the black American ghettos the hero is that man who is offerd only the crumbs from his country's table but by ingenuity and courage is able to take for himself a Lucullan feast. Hence the janitor who lives in one room but sports a robin's-egg-blue Cadillac is not laughed at but admired, and the domestic who buys forty-dollar shoes is not criticized but is appreciated." (p. 218)

One aspect of her culture, however, Angelou found difficult to accept—the fatalism that accompanied religious belief. With rollicking humor she depicts the church meetings of her youth, the obese Reverend Thomas who ate the best parts of grandmother's chicken, and Sister Monroe who turned Sunday services into brawls.

The Southern blacks ("America's historic bowers and scrapers") found in religion hope for a happy hereafter and revenge for their oppressors. Because God loved the poor and outcast, heaven was reserved for downtrodden blacks and a few whites like John Brown. Though whites had "their money and power and segregation and sarcasm and big houses and schools and lawns like carpets, and books . . . it was better to be meek and lowly, spat upon and abused for this little time than to spend eternity frying in the fires of hell." (p. 127-28)

Angelou believed it hateful that cotton pickers worked like oxen, then pretended that things were not really so bad. "My people, " she says, "may be a race of masochists . . . not only was it our fate to live the poorest, roughest life but we . . . liked it like that." (p. 118) Southern blacks gave all the credit to God for whatever meager pleasures they enjoyed but did not blame him for their many misfortunes. In childhood Maya admired a humorless, taciturn man who never went to church. "How great it would be," she thought, "to grow up like that, to be able to stare religion down." (p. 20)

RIGHT-WING OBJECTIONS

Teachers who assign this book should be aware of the areas likely to cause problems. Critics will object to what they perceive as foul language, religious blasphemy, and sexual looseness. Caged Bird can perhaps pass muster on the first. Compared to books where the central character is male, there are surprisingly few "dirty" words—though to a censor one is too many.

The author's descriptions of worship services, told with love and laughter, will probably anger those who permit no humor with regard to religion. Furthermore, the fatalism Angelou encountered in Southern blacks is also part of white fundamentalism. Any other interpretation of Christianity is abhorrent to right-wing believers.

Finally, the issue of sex cannot be ignored. The author's grandmother was married three times. Her divorced parents had a series of live-in partners, which was neither uncommon or reprehensible in their communities. When Maya was eight, she lived for a year in St. Louis and was raped by her mother's lover, an event described in detail. Later she served as lookout for her brother's sex adventures with a classmate. Like many adolescents, Maya worried about being a lesbian. To assuage her fears, she seduced a boy she barely knew—a disappointing experience, but one that resulted in pregnancy. This first phase of her life ends with the birth of a baby boy and her acceptance of motherhood.

Those who believe that the purpose of books is to instill a particular set of right and wrong values will find Caged Bird to be a wicked book indeed. Angelou neither condemns or condones the lifestyle of her family or herself. She felt guilty about her pregnancy and hid the evidence until almost due, but she did not shirk from the responsibility, blame others, nor give in to despair. Be forewarned: those who object to the values in this first book will be even more offended by the next.

CONCLUSIONS

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings is a positive contribution to biographical literature. This poetically written account of an adolescent, female, minority experience is both convincing and moving. Angelou demonstrates the evils of sexism and racism as well as the importance of love, courage, and hope.

Reading this book, however, requires for most white students a suspension of learned beliefs in order to walk in the shoes of another person without judgment. If they can do that, they will gain valuable insight about the pains of oppression and the difficulty of growing up black and female in a society dominated by whites and males.

"If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl," writes the author, "being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat. It is an unnecessary insult." (p. 6) It is also an insult for adolescents and adults to blind themselves to the experiences of those unlike themselves. How can we rid the world of biases if we do not know where they exist?

[1] Followed by Gather Together in My Name, Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas, and The Heart of a Woman.

[2] Quotations taken from Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (New York: Random House, 1969) will hereafter be cited in the text by page numbers only.

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It's OK If You Don't Love Me

Evaluating Anticipated Experience for Readers

Despite its seemingly contradictory title, It's OK If You Don't Love Me[1] is a novel of first love. Given the title, however, you won't be surprised to discover that it isn't the stereotyped girl-meets-boy, girl-gets-boy romance. It does provide elements of the familiar format, initiating in the standard way. Jody Epstein, a seventeen-year-old New Yorker, meets Lyle Alexander during a summer job working at the laboratory of the Sloan-Kettering Hospital. He has recently moved to New York from small-town Ohio to live with his married sister; his parents have been killed in an automobile accident. The meeting is fortuitous for Jody; she has broken up with her boyfriend who has graduated from high school and gone away to college. It is equally a boon for Lyle who is friendless in the big city.

There are some of the usual trappings—dates, family dinners—that establish the novel's game plan and move the plot. The substance of the novel, however, is dramatically different from the standard romance genre. Projecting this average situation and introducing seemingly average teenagers, Norma Klein recognizes their inherent sexuality. Thus, in playing out the events and feelings of their relationship, this sexuality takes on a significant role. Through them and other characters we understand that adolescents ask questions about sex—what it's like, whether to do it, when to do it—and are concerned about sex—how effective a partner they'll be, how they'll be affected. They talk about it, anticipate it and experience it. In a transactional sense, the novel for the reader becomes a "discussion" of this anticipated experience.

Another qualification of what the novel is not: it isn't about out-of-wedlock pregnancy, neither the situation when a young woman is forced to confront her predicament in the face of probable family or social rejection (as in Patricia Dizengo's Phoebe or Jeanette Eyerly's Bonnie Jo, Go Home) nor that in which the young couple is catapulted into premature marriage (as in Ann Head's Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones). These novels project a quite different set of problems and developments.

The concerns that surround Jody and Lyle are not limited to questions of sex. They care about how they relate to others, adults as well as peers. Indeed, the nature of relationships, especially that of love, is the thematic core of the novel.

> "Is it that you don't want to do it! I (Jody) said. "Because we don't have to. It doesn't matter."
> (Lyle) frowned. "Well, the thing is, I'm just not sure I'm in love with you."
> I felt relieved. "That's okay. I'm not sure I'm in love with you."
> "That's what I mean."
> "I don't care if you love me or not."
> "You should."
> "Why?"
> "That's your birthright, Jody, to be loved."
> "It is?"
> "Sure. And I think maybe it will happen with us. We just have to get to know each other better." (98)

This conversation, a line of which recalls the title, occurring not quite midway through the book, brings into focus this theme and the interrelatedness of love and sex.

Lyle presumes the relationship, stating it unhesitantly. It is he who hesitates in this situation, who curbs the desire he feels to which he later admits. But there's more to it than that, for feelings and behavior are shown to be multi-faceted. Part of his reluctance is his lack of experience; part is his basic kindness and his regard for Jody—he would not incur her disfavor with premature advances. However, despite these feelings, his understanding that you have to know a girl well, that there needs to be love between them before experiencing sex, expresses a significant principle upon which the subsequent actions pivot.

Love does develop between Jody and Lyle as does their sexual relationship. But this emotional-physical rite of passage, while providing valuable learning, also serves as the catalyst by which Jody experiences a values-forming rite of passage. She must come to grips with her behavior in relation to her feelings; she must develop the thought and codes—the values that generate those behaviors and feelings. And since she recognizes she isn't an island unto herself, she must understand how she relates to others, how they relate to each other. The book, charged with the emotions of her first-person perspective, explores how she is affected by her own acts and those of others so that her passage reveals a light at the end of the tunnel.

To comprehend Jody's development, it is useful to reveal first some of the elements of the text used by the author as counterpoints for the action and ideas, as instructional devices to illumine the issues. The past is used as an alternative model; the experiences of the parents, particularly Jody's mother, are conveyed to contrast and clarify Jody's choices. Classroom discussions, contemplated in retrospect for insights, highlight the issues.

Conversational flashbacks reveal that Jody's mother grew up in another social milieu, one that promoted inadequacies and interpersonal failures.

> "You don't have to live through that hideous, repressed thing we did . . . When I was in college and started having sexual feelings, you wouldn't believe how guilty and scared I felt! No one your age would even believe it! I

> was too ashamed to talk about it to anyone. I thought I was some sort of freak, just for having feelings that were the most normal, natural thing in the world. So I went leaping into marriage with the first guy I slept with, and, well you know the rest." (118)

And what is "the rest?" A loveless marriage, a marriage initiated in response to appearances, a marriage hurried into and endured. There was little communication and less understanding. It ended in a less-than-amicable divorce. Besides the bitterness, there is a continuing sense of inadequacy.

The assessment is that Mrs. Epstein got herself into this because of her innocence-ignorance. The social practices and contraints of her youth fostered behaviors that were pressured and superficial. The social norms also created ignorance, if not repression, of normal sexual feelings which could not be adequately dealt with and understood. Beyond this was social ostracism:

> ". . .and she's always regaling me with these horror stories about girls who admitted they had slept with someone and then were shunned and never had dates and married awful people as soon as they got to college just because their self-image was wrecked forever." (65)

These pressures affected the men as well. We don't find out specific effects upon Jody's father, though we come to see him as a sexist, self-centered, status-seeking bore, but we do get an inside view of Jody's ex-stepfather. An amiable man, he admits to having been "scared out of my wits," (111) as a young man, to having been made insecure by the expectations of male knowledge and performance in a love-sexual situation. Actually, he informs us, men are uneasy, even terrified. These responses are evidenced in the younger generation both by Lyle's tentative behavior and in Jody's younger brother's uncertainty, masked by quipping bravado.

It is clear that both adults have struggled—are still struggling—to come out from under the handicaps of the past. Unlike her first husband, Mrs. Epstein has attempted to face the problem. To forestall the recurrence of such ignorance and negation, she has created an "open" home. This openness is manifested in the willingness to converse about love and relationships and to respond to questions about sex. These conversations range from dinner table interaction about pregnancy, child rearing and population control to mother-daughter intimacies about men. The presumed impact of this openness is to diminish responses of mystery and fear, to build the ability to develop honest and fulfilling relationships.

The author introduces two interrelated and provocative issues in three classroom discussions, helping to focus them for Jody (and the reader) while she is in the throes of change. Student comments portray "typical" adolescent views and expectations; the teachers, speaking apparently for the author, offer advice and interpretation. The first of these issues is sex by opportunity; the second is "romance or some ideal version of true love." (p. 107) Many of the students (boys and girls) in the sex education class admit to being virgins because of the "lack of opportunity" (p. 74) and in an English class when responding to a composition, "most of the boys couldn't believe that there was a boy who wouldn't sleep with a girl who was willing to sleep with him." (p. 107) These reactions suggest both misplaced values and a non-realistic conception of relationships. A valid relationship, sexual and otherwise, needs more than mere opportunity. As the teacher remarks:

> "Listen, don't get the wrong idea, kids. Don't come away with the idea that I'm advocating you all jump in bed together. Frankly I think there's too much of that already, not too much in that it's bad in and of itself, but too much sex for the wrong reasons. But it puzzles me that for a generation that's supposed to be so realistic about things, there was this kind of pseudoromantic image of: One day I'll see her across a crowded room. I mean, fine. But you can get just so much mileage out of that kind of thing, the mystery thing, and then what? (p. 75)

This and the later comments of the English teacher suggest that the students need to reconsider the reasons for their behavior, in this instance, their sexual behavior, that they need to reformulate their view of reality.

These forewarnings are solidified by the sex education teacher's "The Right to Say No" lecture toward the novel's end which Jody relates in retrospect:

> He claimed that women and girls, especially today, feel they somehow have to agree to sex, now that they can no longer claim they're afraid of getting pregnant, and that's bad. He said no one, even if they're married, should agree to sex if they don't like it. I thought that was a good point. . . (p 223)

Jody's favorable response helps her to crystallize her developing value structure.

These concerns are not academic for Jody; her situation is a test tube example. Her initial responses seem opportunistic, superficial, both those with her previous boyfriend and the first stage with Lyle. In the first instance she's flattered to be chosen by this popular senior and does what seems to be expected; the factor of desire complicates the situation with Lyle but it is otherwise parallel. Lyle's introduction of the concept of love—"That's your birthright, Jody, to be loved"—initiates a process of evaluation. This process is founded on honesty. She tells him of her previous experience; he tells her of his inexperience and uncertainty—no false bravado here. Mutual trust and love develop: she feels secure in having Lyle meet her father's family with her; during that tense weekend Lyle offers her emotional and verbal support. Jody's acceptance of this is conscious, and yet unconscious as evidenced by her indiscretion with her former boyfriend. Belatedly, she does have feelings of guilt. She struggles with her behavior codes and her deeper values. Lyle's anger at her betrayal of trust and love bring her through, eventually, defensive feelings, then remorse and loneliness to apology. And Lyle forgives. She has recognized not only the fragility of love but its importance, beyond mere physical satisfactions, and that trust and loyalty are critical ingredients of a love relationship. At the end of the novel when Jody rejects the "invitation" of a young man at a party, it is clear she has developed a voice in the choices she makes; she has gained some control.

It is easy to imagine what the objections to this book are. The book contains language—three and four letter words—that raises censor's hackles. It contains sexual asides and innuendoes, nudity and references to the body—at one point Jody contemplates her own, at another she fleetingly admires Lyle's towel-wrapped physique. There also are references to body parts, using anatomical language. Frank comments and questions about sexual feelings and activities coincide with the developing love relationship of the two central characters. And it is apparent that they enjoy the sexual side of that relationship which does not lead to pregnancy or disease or societal condemnation.

While these are the major potential objections, certain features of characterization might come under attack as well. Jody could be perceived as too socially-sexually aggressive; she is not the demure heroine of romance who waits by the telephone. The parents, too, might be criticized for their seeming permissiveness. As an example, aside from the "open" home aspect, Mrs. Epstein is cited by Jody in believing that "people should live together before they get married for a year at least, to see if they're going to get along or not." (p. 154)

This perspective, however, ignores the author's method, purpose and ultimate statement. The method is based in effect on a principle of honesty comparable to a code manifested by Jody in the book. Klein's premise of young adult sexuality, their concerns, imaginings, and experimentation, has validity in our late twentieth century reality. Portraying them thus, depicting their insecurities, their innocence under the veneer, their searchings, has comparable validity. In this context her book becomes an effort to inform, to develop insights and values. She does not promote insensitivity or license—to the contrary. Also, there is no voyeurism in the sex situations. Her characters grope towards valuing each other, valuing their emotions and bodies. But it's not exactly groping in the dark. The trials and errors include stumbling, but the moves grow out of open discussion and increasing knowledge. The characters model this standard for the readers. As the readers experience vicariously the chameleon emotions, as they consider the viewpoints which Jody comtemplates, as they respond to her choices and understand her betrayal and its repercussions, they can begin to establish appropriate behavior built from preconsidered values.

There are additional informing comments and presentations which support these directions in the text. Klein restructures the role of women in our society, attempting to reduce their victimization, by establishing an assertive heroine, a thinking, processing heroine who doesn't just let things happen to her. (In contrast to typical romance heroines, Jody has professional goals, a career in the sciences, after attending college.) The anti-sexist stance is reiterated in discussions about male predominance and insecurities when faced with strong women, in the rejction of the social-sexual double standard which promotes a women-as-object response in men. It is heightened by the overt sexist behavior of Jody's father who ignores his daughter's abilities and goals while exaggerating those of her brother. This reduction of second-class citizenry for women is furthered by the knowledge base-of-operations for young women promoted by the text.

Klein chides the "know-it-all-generation" of young adults who think they can do everything and anything. They clearly don't know it all. A specific rejection of ignorance and irresponsibility is the commentary about contraception. For example, the sex education teacher identifies the "bridge-crossing school of contraception":

> ". . .'We'll cross that bridge when we come to it' which, as you ought to know, is simply a time-honored means of passing the buck. . .'I won't be prepared, I won't take responsibility for my actions.' " (p. 76)

This, of course, parallels the statements for action based on knowledge.

A minor but important element of this novel is the presence of the parents. Many romance novels, perhaps as a matter of adolescent focus on independence and apron-string cutting, operate in a world spectrum essentially devoid of adults. Realistically, parents are included in this one both as interactive members of a family unit and also as representatives of a life continuum. That the parents are shown to have problems and needs in their relationships, past and present, that their relationships too are flawed and changing and growing adds another continuum: the reality—not the romance—of human relationships.

These applaudatory remarks are not to say that It's Ok If You Don't Love Me is without flaws. Overall there seems to be an overindulgence in sexual asides and innuendoes , a sense of too much pressed into one book. Some statements seem extraordinary, thus unnecessary, as when Jody's ten-year-old half-cousin asks a provocative, personal question about sex. It is possible that this and all other remarks and incidents could naturally take place in the time frame of the novel. Because many intervening incidents are omitted, the compressed composite creates an unfortunate sense of overstatement. Some balance, I believe, is needed to validate the total impression. Despite this flaw, this book is well worth its reading. It could serve as a fine source of discussion between adults and teenagers who face comparable concerns.

[1] Citations identified parenthetically are from the third edition, paperback, April 1984, published by Ballentine Books.

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Johnny Got His Gun

A Depression-Era Classic

For the life of me I can't understand why Johnny Got His Gun is on a list of frequently censored books. I was surprised, though, to discover that Dalton Trumbo himself had conspired in the suppression of his novel during the early years of World War II. In his introduction to the 1959 Ace paperback edition of the book, Trumbo explained that as World War II deepened certain unnamed, right-wing, presumably pro-Fascist groups "proposed a national rally for peace-now, with me as cheer leader; they promised (and delivered) a letter campaign to pressure the publisher for a fresh edition."[1] Distressed by this political campaign for a negotiated, conditional peace with Hitler, Trumbo worked quickly to forestall any new edition of his novel during the war.[2] Sixteen years later, in 1959, he adamantly maintained the sense and necessity of his wartime decision: "Nothing," he insisted, "could have convinced me so quickly that Johnny was exactly the sort of book that shouldn't be reprinted until the war was at an end. The publishers agreed."[3]

The suppression or frustration of artistic expression in the interests of an overriding national cause as significant and perilous as the Allied war effort against Axis fascism is understandable. I do not agree with this rationale for censorship and would argue against it in whatever forum was open to me, but it is understandable. Now, however, in 1984, I can recognize no understandable reason for suppressing Johnny Got His Gun and I can imagine few capricious reasons. Instead, it seems more plausible to me, though the evidence apparently doesn't bear me out, that parents, school board members, teachers, librarians, professors and publishers would be encouraging the teaching of the novel as a classic of American literary and moral expression.

My only hesitation in deciding to teach the book would be my discomfort with the awkward and strident political rhetoric of its concluding two chapters and with the sentimentality tainting some characters, stylistic traits that diminish the book's literary quality but which it clearly shares with other American novels of the 1930's (Johnny Got His Gun was published on September 3, 1939, two days after the start of World War II). Particularly in the final chapters, Trumbo succumbs to the hackneyed Depression era dichotomy between bosses and victims and, considering the book's reputation as a pacifist fable, he expresses his political rage in an ironically militaristic rhetoric:

> We will use the guns you force upon us we will use them to defend our very lives and the menace to our lives does not lie on the other side of a nomansland that was set apart without our consent it lies within our own boundaries here and now we have seen it and we know it.
>
> Put the guns into our hands and we will use them...You plan the wars you masters of men plan the wars and point the way and we will point the gun. (242-243)

However, the reservations I have about the style of Johnny Got His Gun are minor. The novel's concluding words do limit it to a historical period and conventional style, but, preceding this outburst, Trumbo achieves an art that spans the years; his diction is usually understated and his characters sensibly rendered. The novel is a 1930's classic and should, I believe, be taught as such. One teaching strategy that occurs to me would be to pair as companion novels Johnny Got His Gun and Grapes of Wrath. Each book dramatizes the exploitation of "little people," one in an international environment and the other within a native region, and each seeks to portray convincingly the human dignity of simple characters.

The characters of Johnny Got His Gun are especially memorable: Joe Bonham, of course, but also Jose and the other energetic, irrepressible workers in the Los Angeles bakery; Corporal Timeon, the Scotchman and others in the mixed English and American regiment who struggle to maintain their sanity and humor, as when the Scot refused to fight his Bavarian Prince, the last Stuart heir to the English throne; the "unafraid and gentle" nurse who opens communication with Joe by playfully tracing with her finger the greeting "Merry Christmas" on his chest. Uniting all these simple, appealing characters and epitomizing their qualities of decency, self-reliance and good humor is Joe's father, a portrait Trumbo based closely on the character of his own father.

The autobiographical power of Trumbo's novel is considerable. Joe Bonham's Shale City, Colorado, is Trumbo's Grand Junction, Colorado, and the county fair, birthday party, camping trip, and bakery night-shift, among others, are keenly remembered episodes of Trumbo's life. Repeatedly the novel impresses us with its quality of authentic experience: we are moved by such endearing details as Joe's mother playing sentimental songs on the piano for his father listening at the end of an eight-party telephone line from Cole Creek to Shale City, or of the young Joe carrying home the Saturday night treat of hamburgers in a bag pressed close to his chest under his shirt to keep them warm. These sharply detailed memories of Joe Bonham's family resemble John Steinbeck's attentiveness to the ordinary speech, mannerisms and values of the Joad family in the Oklahoma, New Mexico and Arizona chapters of Grapes of Wrath. Both novelists express well the sensitivity of literary and visual artists of the 1930s to the authentic culture of laborers, tenants and migrants. This sensitivity was inspired by the idea, dramatically realized in these two novels, that in simple people of stable traditions we can understand our humanity and then witness our resilience to degradation in their efforts to survive the traumas and dislocations of unemployment, injury and war.

Both Trumbo's bias in favor of simple people and his technique, well maintained in Book I, of understated, calm rendition are essential to the success of Johnny Got His Gun because Joe Bonham would otherwise be incredible. We need to be convinced of his sanity, emotional stability and secure values—all the quintessential products of his small town culture and affectionate family—in order to hear and accept as plausible his calm recital of his grotesque injuries:

> It was funny how calm he was. He was quiet just like a storekeeper taking spring inventory and saying to himself I see I have no eyes better put that down in the order book. He had no legs and no arms and no eyes and no ears and no nose and no mouth and no tongue....But he couldn't die because he couldn't kill himself. If he could only breathe he could die. That was funny but it was true. He could hold his breath and kill himself. That was the only way left. Except that he wasn't breathing. His lungs were pumping air but he couldn't stop them from doing it. He couldn't live and he couldn't die. (62-63)

Incredible though he seems, Joe's character is based on a real person. Trumbo told his biographer, Bruce Cook, of a newspaper account he had read in the early 1930s of the Prince of Wales tour of a Canadian veterans hospital to decorate a totally disabled veteran who, like Joe Bonham, had lost all limbs and senses except touch. The Prince could only communicate his admiration and gratitude by kissing the soldier on the forehead;[4] this incident is the framework for the decoration and kiss of Joe Bonham in Chapter 13.

It is a measure of Trumbo's artistry that he did not allude to outside sources to corroborate Joe's condition. Instead, Trumbo established Joe entirely within the novel's reference. The means by which he does this, though potentially confusing to high school and college age readers, are, I believe, well carried through. First, he divides the novel into two books, "The Dead" and "The Living." Book I, "The Dead," concerns Joe's emergence into sustained consciousness and his deliberate mastery over the possibility and temptation of insanity, nowhere more powerfully represented than in Joe's hallucination of a rat nibbling at the open, draining wound in his side, an hallucination triggered by his horrifying memory of trench rats feeding on corpses:

> The rat came crawling over him stealthily. It came with its sharp little claws up his left leg. It was a great brown trench rat like the ones they used to throw shovels at. It came crawling and sniffing and smelling and tearing away at the bandage over his side. He could feel its whiskers as they tickled the edges of the draining wound. He could feel its long whiskers as they trailed in the pus from the hole. And there was nothing he could do about it. (90)
>
> ---
>
> He thought Jesus Joe there must be some other way. He thought it's asking very little for a man just to want to be able to prove that he's awake. He thought come on Joe this is the only way you can lick the rat and you've got to do that so you'd better figure out some way quick to prove whether you're awake or asleep. (96)

We are convinced of Joe's capacity for the deliberate, rational mastery of his horrors because throughout Book I we have observed him recover his sane identity in increasingly detailed and coherent memories. And of all these memories in Book I there is only one extended memory of the war, which doesn't occur until Chapter 7. By emphasizing memories of peace rather than war, Trumbo quite subtly unfolds the revelation of Joe Bonham's physical incapacity and appalling experience within an environment of sanity and health; he reveals the essential Joe Bonham as a restrained, calm voice, as a man whose sanity and identity are secure in his living memory of family and community.

Whereas Book I works to establish Joe Bonham's strength of character, Book II, "The Living," tests that strength, just as the California chapters of Grapes of Wrath test the rural independence and virtue of the Joads. Depression era literature is noteworthy for its conviction that ordinary people would necessarily face severe tests of their values, traditions and dignity. The most frustrating tests Joe faces in his five-year hospitalization are not the horrors of the past war, though these memories become more frequent and sustained in Book II, but the indifference of his present guardians. Within the intensely charged environment of increasingly long and detailed memories of the trench war, leaves in Paris, troop train departures and the final bomb explosion that disabled Joe, Book II describes Joe's persistent, sane effort to break from his past and communicate with his nurses and doctors. He methodically, obsessively thumps his head against his pillow in the Morse code of SOS.

It is Trumbo's intention in Book II, I believe, to connect the war and the peace, to expose the same conditions of exploitation in each environment. That is why Joe's effort to communicate is set within chapters of war memories and, just as in the war, what Joe discovers in peace is that he is treated as a conscript, one without authority or rights. When his efforts at communication are first dimly recognized in Chapter 15, not as sensible communication but as a disturbance that must be quieted, Joe is drugged into unconsciousness. As he fights the drug's effect, he dreams for the first time his vivid nightmare of Jesus Christ astraddle the locomotive of a troop train hurtling to its ruin. Then, in the tender scenes of Chapters 18 and 19, when the nurse initiates communication and he responds, he is again rejected; this time more devastating because those rejecting him have understood his message. In response to the doctor's question, "What do you want?", Joe had tapped his request to be let out. The doctor responds that such a request is against regulations and drugs him. He again dreams the troop train nightmare and this time hears the wail of the mother at his train departure "crying my son my little boy my son." (238)

I am convinced that Johnny Got His Gun has endured because of its literary qualitites; in Joe's memories and in his conscious efforts to retain and assert his human identity, we are impressed by Trumbo's restrained diction, memorable characterizations and subtle construction. The novel did not endure because it was a convenient political sermon; in fact, the pacifism of Johnny Got His Gun is neither simple nor dogmatic.

Trumbo's biography reveals his own unsettled notion of pacifism; he firmly supported the Allied war effort against fascism, considering unconditional surrender the only acceptable resolution. In his novel, his pacifism is limited and retrograde; it looks back to World War I and applies only to wars that resemble that one. What distinguished World War I was its outrageous butchery in service of absurd, shamefully hypocritical slogans. It was neither a war of ideology nor a war that impinged on American interests:

> He lay and thought oh Joe Joe this is no place for you. This was no war for you. This thing wasn't any of your business. What do you care about making the world safe for democracy? All you wanted to do Joe was to live. You were born and raised in the good healthy country of Colorado and you had no more to do with Germany or England or France or even with Washington D.C. than you had to do with the man in the moon. (24)

To Trumbo's mind, World War II was an ideological war directly threatening United States security. Vietnam, however, reminded him of World War I and he promoted a new edition of his novel during that war. In the introduction to that 1970 edition, he echoes the World War I realities and post World War I attitudes of Johnny Got His Gun in detailing Vietnam's slaughter, its distance from any real concern of the United States, and its moral vacuity:

> Over breakfast coffee we read of 40,000 American dead in Vietnam. Instead of vomiting, we reach for the toast...Vietnam has given us eight times as many paralytics as World War II, three times as many totally disabled, 35% more amputees...But exactly how many hundreds or thousands of the dead-while-living does that give us? We don't know. We don't ask. We turn away from them. (introduction, n.p.)

Dalton Trumbo's anti-war novel is not pacifism but the selective pacifism of the Great Depression. Students of American history and literature will be enriched by reading this vivid expression of the emotions and ideas that sustained the isolationist conviction of that era. Angered with phony wars fought for hypocritical ideals, Joe Bonham asserts that the only concrete value is life:

> The most important thing is your life little guys. You're worth nothing dead except for speeches. Don't let them kid you any more. Pay no attention when they tap you on the shoulder and say come along we've got to fight for liberty or whatever their word is there's always a word.
>
> Just say mister I'm sorry I got no time to die. I'm too busy and then turn and run like hell. (118)

It took the aggression of Nazi Germany, the attack on Pearl Harbor and the invasion Soviet Russia to convince Dalton Trumbo that war could be the necessary means of defending ideas, values and life. Joe Bonham lacked such experience. He speaks to us from within the limits of World War I, a victim sacrificed for hollow words.

ENDNOTES

1. Dalton Trumbo, Johnny Got His Gun (New York: Bantam Books, 1983) introduction, n. p.
2. Bruce Cook, Dalton Trumbo (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977) p. 149.
3. Trumbo, introduction, n. p. Hereafter, the page numbers of all quotations from the Bantam edition of Johnny Got His Gun will be noted in parentheses within the text immediately following the quotation.
4. Cook, p. 125.

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Gordon Parks' The Learning Tree: Autobiography and Education

Who speaks for Gordon Parks? Who should have to? Parks was born in 1912 in Fort Scott, Kansas, youngest of fifteen children in a poor, black farm family. When he was sixteen, his mother died, and Gordon moved to St. Paul, Minnesota, to live with a married sister. He dropped out of high school, held low-skill jobs, and spent six months seriously ill. Though he tried painting, sculpture, and song writing, he was, at twenty-one, still a railroad porter and bar-car waiter, but in 1937 he decided to become a professional photographer, so he spent $12.50 for a Voightlander Brilliant at a pawnshop. Remarkably, he soon had a lucrative business doing portraits of society women in Chicago. During World War II he was a photographer for the Office of War Information and afterward a staff photographer for Standard Oil of New Jersey, then for twenty years, for Life. In 1968 he became the first black to direct a major Hollywood studio film when he adapted and composed the score for his own book, The Learning Tree, which he followed with Shaft, Shaft's Big Score, The Super Cops, and Leadbelly. He has composed concertos and sonatas performed by symphony orchestras in the United States and Europe. Among his books are Flash Photography (1947), The Poet and His Camera (1968), Gordon Parks: Whispers of Intimate Things (1971, poems) and two more books of poems, Born Black (1971, illustrated essays and interviews), Flavio (1978), and, most significantly, two autobiographical works, The Learning Tree (1963, autobiographical novel) and A Choice of Weapons (1966). Though he did not graduate from high school, he has at least seven honorary degrees, including a Litt. D. from Kansas State University. Such a "Horatio Alger" life speaks for itself.

Gordon Parks speaks for Gordon Parks. Autobiographers, self-life-writers, transform the real history of life lived into literary form, thus both sharing their experiences while, unlike a Horatio Alger hero, exploring identity and probing motivations behind their actions. Autobiography is the most powerful genre available to us in this time when identity itself is in jeopardy, a period popularly characterized by alienation, the absurd, and dehumanization. In The Learning Tree, Parks, in a novel based on his own youth, offers especially to the adolescent reader such an account of the education and formation of character from the end of childhood to his premature independence precipitated by his mother's death. Gordon Parks lived this. He shares it. A reader has no choice but to respond to its reality.

It is difficult to describe the plot of autobiography beyond a series of "this happened's," but in The Learning Tree, Newt Winger, Parks' alter ego, confronts love, death, play, school, sex, hate, race, religion, law, nature, friendship, loneliness, and the truth that only fiction, not life, can end happily ever after. Newt's mother, Sara, provides as much outline as one needs when she tells her son

> If you learn to profit from the good and bad these people (of Cherokee Flats, The Learning Tree's Fort Scott) do to each other, you'll learn a lot 'bout life. And you'll be a better man for learnin' someday...No matter if you go or stay, think of Cherokee Flats like that till the day you die—let it be your learnin' tree. (35-36)[1]

The story of The Learning Tree describes a boy growing up. It begins so fast that the pace is sometimes exhausting, risking melodrama and cliche, but there is a steady development of the boy's character. Newt is twelve as he begins his progress toward maturity. It begins

> Newt Winger lay belly-flat at the edge of the cornfield, his brown chin close to the ground, his eyes glued to a hill of busy ants. He singled out one struggling with tree bark twice its size, tugging it forward then sideways then backward up the incline. . . For five of his twelve years he had watched these creatures, remembering that his father often spoke of their energy and work habits in contrast to those of the listless blacks and whites in Cherokee Flats. (7)

Newt, at twelve, is still a child, trained in observation but without experience, or the ability to reason or generalize. He is unaware that to succeed in the life ahead of him he will need to "pull a tree trunk up a mountainside," with energy and work habits and direction. "As the ant reached the top, the glitter suddenly dimmed and bits of mound blew into Newt's eye." (7) Thus, the story starts with a cyclone, a violent natural act that catapults Newt out of his passive childhood into the road to maturity. This cyclone does not land Newt in Oz, however, but in the borderline of Kansas, borderline for the black man, "freedom loosed one hand while custom restrained the other," where "the law books stood for equal rights, but the law never bothered to enforce such laws in the books." (26) Within the next few hours he experiences violence—the storm itself, a slashed leg, a blow to the head; sex—his rescuer, Big Mabel, goes beyond the limits of Florence Nightingale to warm the wet, cold injured boy; death—as the storm abates, a good neighbor is discovered under his tornado-crushed roof. The primal life forces, sex and death, start Newt on the path to maturity. The observer of ants becomes an initiate or participant in life. But the path is not easy. There is as much bad (race, poverty, doors closed, hate, the siren song of quitting the "work" of becoming mature) as there is good.

He begins to observe others' behavior—in response to the storm, his father gives skin for a graft to a girl burned in a storm-related fire, while his brother-in-law, Clint, just retreats from the chaos into drunken irresponsibility. He begins to question—he startles his mother during a conversation about "people and things" by questioning the ways of God relative to who was lost and who was saved during the storm and expressing fear of death as the mysterious limit of life. He begins to act—caught in a boy's sin, stealing peaches with his little band of merry friends, a caper which turns ugly when an outcast acquaintance, Marcus Savage, beats the orchard owner; Newt confesses, not out of self-service, but in respect for the truth. He begins to learn—at the house where his mother is a domestic servant, he is inspired by "a whole new world of knowledge," misfocused at first on words such as papilionidae and zygomorphic, but still a vision of a future that could be college and music and art. And he begins, just begins, to mature—despite his sexual initiation during the cyclone, he still is innocent enough to be bowled over by "boy-she's-pretty" first love for Arcella Jefferson.

The observation intensifies as the book catalogues a spectrum of social mores and character types: a comic minister who "preaches if" and eats Sister Winger's fried chicken, a redneck sheriff, a spoiled rich kid, an ambitious politician, and a good, country doctor. Newt's questions do not have simple answers. The book, which begins with death, also ends with it. The acts, learning, and the maturation join together in what emerges as the central story line, if such a term can be used for autobiography.

Meanwhile, Newt has a counterpoint in Marcus Savage. Newt is poor and black, but he is provided with strength, love, and faith of his parents. Marcus is black and poorer and is emotionally starved by his abusive, drunken widowed father, Booker. Newt strays from right behavior, such as stealing peaches, fighting, or romantically lusting for Arcella, but he is guided toward choices that build responsibiltiy, sensitivity, and decency. Marcus is also an outlaw, but he responds to his social confrontations with anger, violence, and inarticulate bitterness. Newt vows growth; Marcus revenge. They clash after the peach episode, and Marcus is sent to reform school. They fight in a staged "Mississippi free-for-all" (reminiscent of Ellison's battle royal in Invisible Man) at a circus, unified ironically by the animal cruelty of the white audience. And they fight finally when Marcus seeks to kill Newt, whom he sees as a symbol of all the oppression and degradation that has crushed him. Thus, as Newt responds to the good and bad of his racial status, his economic limitations, and his social interactions all as the source material for formation of his identity, Marcus furiously submits to all its negative force. The Learning Tree is a powerful book about growing up, not merely black, but human.

So who would speak against Gordon Parks? Why, "they" do, of course. On Lee Burress's 1982 list, prepared for the NCTE, of the 600 books challenged since 1965, The Learning Tree ranks seventeenth in frequency of citation.[2] "Denigrating racial epithets toward blacks and whites," vulgar language, "cheap, explicit passages on sex," and objectionable words are among the charges.[3] Though one hates to do Gabler work, I tallied the objectionable words (forgive any inaccuracy; I really can find more enobling uses for my time than counting "dirty" words). There are seventy-three curses, mainly from the mouths of drunks, mobs, or redneck jailers and sheriffs. Jack Winger never curses; Marcus Savage seldom does not. Sheriff Kirky swears in every sentence, though when he says "damn" in the Winger house, Sarah Winger corrects him, "you watch your tongue in this house, Kirky. We don't use cuss words here!" (50) The damns, hells, and bastards appear in clusters to show inarticulate ignorance, self-degrading character, and violent situations. Add twenty-three obscenities, including the f-word once, during Marcus's crazed death struggle; thirteen blasphemies, all goddamns except for a ludicrous scene where the drunken brother-in-law, Clint, is standing on a hen house, firing a shotgun at "Christ" (the strong, devout Sarah stops the foolishness and models the way for sensible behavior); seventeen sexual descriptions including one sex act, but mostly boyish giggles about breasts and underpants; and twelve potential indecencies such as rump (Beansie burned his, stuffing stolen sausage in his hip pocket). Parks is not very subtle. The mob scenes at the free-for-all, the lynching of Booker Savage, and the Spit Reform School probably all go on too long or repeat too much. But autobiographer Parks describes his characters and illustrates their bigotry and ignorance by drawing from the life. An adolescent reader may be distracted by the indecencies, but the drama and character conflict should take over powerfully enough so the cussin' would sink into background atmosphere.

As to racial epithets, blacks are called "niggers," whites "peckerwoods." However, the two times Newt is called "nigger," he is shocked into more intense awareness of pervasive racism; his consciousness is raised, in modern parlance. Each time the scene is followed by something offering perspective, first a discussion with his blind and wise Uncle Rob, then by an ironic ignorant use of "nigger" by a white schoolfriend of Newt's. I suspect from the number of books about minorities on Lee Burress's list that it is not racial opprobrium but the existence of racial minorities per se that makes the censors nervous.

One could find other elements to challenge. The comic Pastor Broadnap might be considered anticlerical, and there is some serious skepticism in Newt's maturing considerations of religion. There is a scene depicting a hypocritical school board, and more than one teacher, black and white, is displayed as foolish, so perhaps authority is shown in less than perfect light. Arcella and Newt's sister, Prissy, are sometimes sketched as mere female stereotypes. Except for Sarah, Parks does not recreate women (or the rich) with much skill. If The Learning Tree is considered for young readers, one might even challenge the grammar of the characters' speech. Lastly, and this is called "criticism" rather than censorship, the book is not great literature, not the equal of Huck Finn, Black Boy, or Angelou's Caged Bird. It is often melodramatic, sometimes cliche-ridden, and as repetitive and as disjointed as life itself. A teacher, recommending this book for public school, might have to spend more than one evening speaking for Gordon Parks.

However, I will speak for Gordon Parks' The Learning Tree. It's a d----d good book. In an address at Kansas University in 1973, Gordon Parks said "the trick has been to try and tell the entire story—to interlock, in some reasonable way, the good experience with the bad."[4] Such an exploration of human experience, charting a real human progress, cannot be dismissed because the reality descibed is sometimes indecorous. Sarah Winger sets Newt's course in the "learning tree" analogy—only if you profit from the good and the bad, can you achieve the better mature life possible, which is not guaranteed. Milton, in Areopagitica, rejects censorship because cloistered virtue is not virtue at all, but ignorance. The profit, says Sarah, is a

> matter of givin' more to this world than you take away from it. . . It's bein' able to love when you want'a hate—to forgive them that work against you—to tell the truth even when it hurts—to share your bread, no matter how hungry you are yourself. Dyin' comes easy when you know you've done all these things right. (36)

She gives this advice to Newt at the beginning of his adolescence, and the rest of the book demonstrates how he must convert this advice slowly into his own identity, a new generation finding a new voice. His counterpart, Marcus Savage, to whom the world gives almost nothing, nevertheless gives even less back to it and fails to survive. Newt, on the contrary, is able to stand at his mother's deathbed, strong enough to receive her last directions: ''believe in somethin' and live up to it.'' (227)

We, in education, believe the only path to maturity is lifelong learning. Readers of the autobiographical Learning Tree have the opportunity to experience this theory. First comes the advice from blind Uncle Rob Winger: ''Learn all you can, so when bigger things come you'll be ready for them,'' (69) and from his mother, who contradicts his father's resignation: ''the white man's got the money and guns—that spells power,'' with ''schoolin's more powerful than guns or money in the end.'' (72) Newt realizes this advice in a variety of contexts: he learns to box from his brother, Pete, before he finds he must fight Marcus in the ring; he maintains his curiosity about science and dictionaries before he is confronted with the unexpected obstacle of a guidance counselor's prejudice, when he is told blacks ''aren't college material,'' so he does not submit to reduced self-esteem because he already has an ''educated'' perspective on education itself (his principal supports his ideals); he ''schools'' his character, with help from his family, so in the dramatic center of the plot, a murder trial in which he, only, knows the truth which, if told, would save an innocent man but probably provoke racial violence, he nevertheless has matured enough to put truth above consequences. The result is full maturity: ''he was free now, free to meet violence if need be, as he had met the truth.'' (205) A reader can recall Sarah's earlier promise, ''dyin' comes easy when you know you've done all these things right.'' The human storm rages, bigotry, sex, violence, greed, hate, death—there are nine deaths in this book—but Newt Winger weathers through to faith, belief, love, and understanding.

When the final ''big thing'' comes up, after Sarah's death, when Newt is once again at a transition, this time from adolescence to independence, he must confront Marcus, who in his savage anger, hunts Newt in order to kill him. Marcus reviews his stunted life. '' 'Ain't got nobody now . . .' He plucked a small ant crawling over his knee, held it for a moment, watching it wiggle helplessly; then his powerful black fingers rubbed it into nothingness.'' (219) But when Newt, the ant-watcher, meets Savage, the ant-killer, the four years of schooling in love, work, dignity, education, pride, freedom, and truth, give him superiority. Though wounded, Newt gains physical superiority. ''For a split second their eyes burned into each other.'' (238) Newt is tempted to kill. But he then gains something greater, moral superiority, and he lets Marcus escape (though Kirky chases Marcus to his death). ''Able to love when you want to hate,'' his mother had said. I hope the censors have not missed the Christian teaching in this book.

Thus, The Learning Tree is a compelling history of growing up, available to anyone who can identify with a universal exploration of human experience. No matter if a reader's time, race, religion, gender, or social environments are different. Any book about growing up is a story of learning, the hard choices, here guided by the love and faith of family, in search of the sources of identity and even more realistic and mature understanding.[5] This book allows the reader to share insight into why a Gordon Parks is ''miraculously'' transformed from a cypher on the plains of Kansas to a man prepared for his success in such a variety of creative expressions. The autobiographical The Learning Tree is also a moral fable. Gordon Parks said ''look at me and know that to destroy me is to destroy yourself. . . I too am America.''[6] I, your critic, am white, affluent, chaste of language and behavior, even grammatically above reproach. But I need not speak for Gordon Parks. He speaks for me.

Endnotes:

[1] Gordon Parks, The Learning Tree, Greenwich, CT: A Fawcett Crest Book, 1963. Note, please, that this book is not in the collection of the ''major research library'' at Colorado State University, and my copy was purchased second-hand, having been ''exiled'' from a suburban Denver high school library.

[2] Lee Burress and Edward B. Jenkinson, The Students' Right to Know, Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1982, pp. 15-16.

[3] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom, July, 1978, p. 88.

[4] Gordon Parks, ''A Look Back,'' Kansas Quarterly 7, No. 3 (1975), p. 8.

[5] Mary Burger, ''I, Too, Sing America: The Black Autobiographer's Response to Life in the Midwest and Mid-Plains,'' Kansas Quarterly 7, No. 3 (1975), p. 55.

[6] Parks, ''A Look Back,'' p. 10.

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Teaching Rationale for William Golding's Lord of the Flies

Lord of the Flies is William Golding's parable of life in the latter half of the twentieth century, the nuclear age, when society seems to have reached technological maturity while human morality is still pre-pubescent. Whether or not one agrees with the pessimistic philosophy, the idiocentric psychology or the fundamentalist theology espoused by Golding in the novel, if one is to use literature as a "window on the world," this work is one of the panes through which one should look.

The setting for Lord of the Flies is in the literary tradition of Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe and Johann Wyss's The Swiss Family Robinson, and like these earlier works provides the necessary ingredients for an idyllic utopian interlude. A plane loaded with English school boys, aged five through twelve, is being evacuated to a safe haven in, perhaps, Australia to escape the "Reds," with whom the English are engaged in an atomic war. Somewhere in the tropics the plane is forced to crash land during a violent storm. All the adults on board are lost when the forward section of the plane is carried out to sea by tidal waves. The passenger compartment, fortuitously, skids to a halt on the island, and the young passengers escape uninjured.

The boys find themselves in a tropical paradise: bananas, coconuts and other fruits are profusely available. The sea proffers crabs and occasional fish in tidal pools, all for the taking. The climate is benign. Thus, the stage is set for an idyllic interlude during which British fortitude will enable the boys to master any possible adversity. In fact, Golding relates that just such a nineteenth century novel, R.M. Ballantyne's Coral Island, was the inspiration for Lord of the Flies. In that utopian story the boy castaways overcame every obstacle they encountered with the ready explanation, "We are British, you know!"

Golding's tropical sojourners, however, do not "live happily ever after." Although they attempt to organize themselves for survival and rescue, conflicts arise as the boys first neglect, then refuse, their assigned tasks. As their "society" fails to build shelters or to keep the signal fire going, fears emanating from within—for their environment is totally non-threatening—take on a larger than life reality. Vines hanging from trees become "snake things" in the imaginings of the "little'uns." A nightmare amidst fretful sleep, causing one of the boys to cry out in the night, conjures up fearful "beasties" for the others. Their fears become more real than existence on the tropical paradise itself when the twins, Sam 'n Eric, report their enervating experience with the wind-tossed body of the dead parachutist. Despite Simon's declaration that "there is no beast, it's only us," and Piggy's disavowal of "ghosts and things," the fear of the unknown overcomes their British reserve and under Jack's all-too-willing chieftainship the boys' retreat from civilization begins.

In the inital encounter with a pig, Jack is unable to overcome his trained aversion to violence to even strike a blow at the animal. Soon, however, he and his choirboys-turned-hunters make their first kill. They rationalize that they must kill the animals for meat. The next step back from civilization occurs and the meat pretext is dropped; the real objective is to work their will on other living things.

Then, killing begins to take on an even more sinister aspect. The first fire the boys build to attract rescuers roars out of control and one of the younger boys is accidentally burned to death. The next death, that of Simon, is not an accident. He is beaten to death when he rushes into the midst of the ritual dance of the young savages. Ironically, he has come to tell the boys that he has discovered that the beast they fear is not real. Then Piggy, the last intellectual link with civilization, is killed on impulse by the sadistic Roger. Lastly, all semblance of civilized restraint is cast-off as the now-savage tribe of boys organizes itself to hunt down and kill their erstwhile leader, Ralph, who had tried desperately to prepare them to carry on in the fashion expected of upper middle-class British youth.

That Golding intended Lord of the Flies as a paradigm for modern civilization is concretely evident at the conclusion of the work. During the final confrontation at the rock fort between Ralph and Piggy and Jack and his tribe, the reader readily forgets that these individuals in conflict are not adults. The manhunt for Ralph, too, seems relative only to the world of adults. The reader is so inclined to lose sight of the age of his characters that Golding must remind that these participants are pre-adolescents: The naval officer who interrupts the deadly manhunt sees "A semicircle of little boys, their bodies streaked with colored clay, sharp sticks in hand..." Unlike that officer, the reader knows that it was not "fun and games" of the boys that the naval officer interrupted. The officer does not realize—as the reader knows—that he has just saved Ralph from a sacrificial death and the other boys from becoming premeditated murderers. Neither is the irony of the situation very subtle: The boys have been "rescued" by an officer from a British man-of-war, which will very shortly resume its official activities as either hunter or hunted in the deadly adult game of war.

Golding, then, in Lord of the Flies is asking the question which continues as the major question haunting the world today: How shall denizens of the earth be rescued from our feats and our own pursuers—ourselves? While Golding offers no ready solutions to our dilemma, an understanding of his parable yields other questions which may enable readers to become seekers in the quest for a moral world. Even if one disagrees with Golding's judgment of the nature of human beings and of human society, one profits from his analysis of the problems confronting people today.

There are reasons for teachers of English to select literary works for study other than the specific content of the literature. It is the task of the English teacher to prepare students to become lifelong readers of many and varied works of literature. Consequently, a literary work is often chosen for in-class study in spite of rather than because of the story line. That is, the objective of the selecting teacher may well be to choose a piece of literature which demonstrates the techniques and the artistry with which the work is written rather than because of the issue or purpose espoused by the author. The teacher does not choose the work nor teach the content of the piece as if it were a textbook in some discipline, but, instead, uses the work because it is exemplary of the writing process and to enable the students to learn the keys to reading and understanding other pieces of literature, not just the specific work in question. Lord of the Flies is one work which might well be chosen for just such a reason.

Golding is a master at his trade and Lord of the Flies has achieved critical acclaim as the best of his works. Indeed, a dictionary of literary terminology might well be illustrated with specific examples from this piece of prose. The development of the several focal characters in this work is brilliantly and concretely done. In addition, the omniscient narrative technique, plotting, relating story to setting and the use of irony, foreshadowing, and certainly, symbolism are so carefully and concretely accomplished that the work can serve as an invaluable teaching aid to prepare students to read other literature with a degree of understanding far beyond a simplistic knowledge of the surface events of the story. Golding's characterizations will be used in this rationale to illustrate these technical qualities of the novel.

A strength of Lord of the Flies lies in techniques of characterization. There are five major characters who are developed as wholly-rounded individuals whose actions and intensity show complex human motivation: Ralph, Jack, Roger, Simon and Piggy. A study of these characterizations shows the wide range of techniques for developing persona utilized by Golding and by other authors:

Ralph, the protagonist, is a rather befuddled everyman. He is chosen for leadership by the group for all the wrong reasons. Ralph does not seek the leadership role; he is elected because he is older (12 plus), somewhat larger, is attractive in personal appearance and, most strikingly, he possesses the conch shell which reminds the boys of the megaphone with which their late adult supervisors directed and instructed them. In the unsought leadership role Ralph demonstrates courage, intelligence and some diplomatic skill. On the negative side he quickly becomes disillusioned with the democratic process and without Piggy's constant urgings would have cast aside the chief's role even before Jack's coup d'etat. Ralph also demonstrates other weaknesses as he unthinkingly gives away Piggy's hated nickname and, more significantly, he gets caught up in the mob psychology of the savage dance and takes part in the ritualistic murder of Simon. Thus, by relating causes and effects, Golding reveals Ralph's change from a proper British lad to group leader to his disenchantment and finally to his becoming the object of the murdurous hunt by the boys who once chose him as their leader.

Jack, the antagonist, is developed as the forceful villain. Outgoing, cocky and confident, Jack marches his choir boys in military formation up the beach to answer the call of the conch. Jack is a natural leader who, except for his exploitative nature, might have been a congealing force for good. Instead, his lust for power precipitates the conflict with Ralph and Piggy's long-range planning for rescue. To attain leadership, Jack caters to boyish desires for ready delights and after he is assured that his choir boys will follow in this new direction, he resorts to intimidation to increase his following. In Jack, Golding has developed a prototype of the charismatic leader who gains adherents by highlighting the fears and fulfilling the ephemeral needs and desires of followers.

Roger, "the hangman's horror," is a stereotyped character who does not change. He readily sheds a thin veneer of civilization which has been imposed upon him by the authority of the policeman and the law. So easily his arm loses the restraints which had once prohibited him from hitting the littl'uns with tossed rocks to a point where he can kill Piggy on impulse. It is but one more small step for him to proclaim the ritual dance must end in killing and to premeditate the murder of Ralph.

Simon is the quintessential Christ-figure. A thin, frail little boy, subject to fainting spells, he alone has the mental acumen and the courage to go onto the mountain and disprove the existence of the "beast." He is martyred for his efforts by the group which no longer wishes to hear his "good news."

Piggy, the pragmatic intellectual, is of necessity the most steadfast in motivation. He is tied to civilization by his physical weaknesses. Overweight, asthmatic, and completely dependent for sight upon his spectacles, the life of the happy savage has no allure for him. Without the aids of civilization, such as eye glasses and allergy shots, he cannot long survive. Consequently, he must reject the ephemeral allures offered by Jack and steadfastly hold, and seek to hold Ralph, to maintaining the smoke signal; his only hope for the aid and succor of rescue. His steadfastness in this aim enables him to call up the uncharacteristic courage to make the last appeal to Jack and his tribe before the rock fort because "right is right." His plea is to no avail; the sadistic Roger releases the boulder which throws Piggy from the cliff to his death.

Another minor character, Percival Weems Botts, is developed as a stereotype to demonstrate the fragility of rote learning. This "little'un" who can only recite his name and address as a response soon forgets even that as all trappings of civilization are lost by the boys.

Thus, Golding's techniques of characterization afford superior examples of the writer's craft and apt material to use to help students learn to interpret authorial voice and to respond to a piece of literature as a level beyond the denotative.

Lord of the Flies has earned for itself and its author great critical acclaim. It has also been extolled by teachers for the excitement it can engender in readers and as a work in which the motivation of characters is readily understood by adolescent readers. Despite these accolades for the novel as a work of literary art and as a teaching tool, Lord of the Flies has on occasion aroused the ire of would-be censors.

Some have opposed the use of the novel in the classroom because of the use of "vulgar" language. Certain words, notably "sucks," "ass," and the British slang word "bloody," are used. It is patently obvious that there is no prurient motivation behind the author's choice of these words. Not one of these words is ever used outside of a context in which the word appears to be quite naturally the word the character would use. The choir boys may well sing like "angels," as is stated; nevertheless, these are perfectly normal pre-adolescent boys. Given the proclivities of such youth the world over, verisimilitude would be lost had they, amongst themselves, always spoken like angels.

The sexual symbolism of the killing of the sow has also raised some puritanical brows. This violent scene is described in terms which might well be used to describe a rape. Such symbolism is fully justified, however, if the author is to be allowed to make his point that the motivation of the boys, casting away the cloak of civilization, is no longer merely securing food. Rather, they have moved from serving practical needs to an insane lust for working their will upon other creatures. The next step is the slaughter of their own kind.

Objection, too, has come upon that very point: children killing children. One must remind those who object to this violence that this piece of literature is a parable. Children are specifically used to show that even the innocence of childhood can be corrupted by fears from within. Those who would deny Golding this mode of establishing his theme would deny to all authors the right to make their point in an explicit fashion.

The most vociferous denunciation of Lord of the Flies has been vocalized by those who have misread the book to the point that they believe it deals with Satanism. The symbolism of the title, which is the English translation of the Greek word "Beelzebub," is surely being misinterpreted by such folk. In fact, theologian Davis Anderson states unequivocally that "Golding is a Christian writer." Anderson defines the central theme of Lord of the Flies as a statement of what it is like to experience the fall from innocence into sin and to experience damnation. Thus, a theologian sees the novel as one dealing with the Christian doctrine of original sin and of the rupture of man's relationship with God! Consequently, one who would attack this novel as an exercise in Satanism assuredly holds an indefensible premise.

Thus, Lord of the Flies meets all criteria for use in the classroom. It has demonstrated its appeal and delight to adolescent readers. It has met with critical acclaim and is generally accorded a place among the modern classics of literature. It deals with a significant universal theme with obvious contemporary ramifications. Moreover, it is rendered with artistry and in an exemplary style and manner. And, lastly, the accusations of those censors who would deny its use in the classroom are demonstrably false. In the final analysis Lord of the Flies is a novel which comes highly recommended by critics and teachers over a period of three decades for study by mature, senior high school students of literature.

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Love Story by Eric Segal

A Rationale for Classroom Use

All the world loves a good story, and even more, a good love story. Love Story was an immediate success as a movie in 1970. The novel, written soon after the movie was produced, was a best seller.

The narrator of the novel is Oliver Barrett IV, a senior at Harvard and a star on the hockey team. His father is a successful and wealthy lawyer and a former athlete—"he rowed single sculls in the 1928 Olympics. . .he was sixth in the finals." The family expectations for Oliver IV are high, including Harvard law school and participation on the prestigious Harvard Law Review. A building on the Harvard campus is named after his great-grandfather "who happened to give it to Harvard." Oliver is blessed with material goods, is a good student, and is a successful athlete as evidenced by his accomplishments on the Harvard hockey team.

The other main character is Jennifer Cavilleri, "an American of Italian descent." Her mother was killed in an auto accident when Jennifer was very young. Her father Phil is the owner of a bakery in Cranston, Rhode Island. He is proud of her and her accomplishments but also protective (he has not allowed her to drive a car). Jennifer meets Oliver in the Radcliffe library where she works part-time. She is a talented music major at Radcliffe, has been awarded a scholarship to study in Paris, but gives it up to marry Oliver. She has a sarcastic sense of humor and uses obscene and insulting language. It is partly this spunk that attracts Oliver to her.

During lunch at the Harvard Club with his father, Oliver tries to talk about Jennifer. His father resists the marriage plans, calling them a fait accompli and a rebellious act toward his family. Oliver tries to get his father to admit that it is because Jennifer is a Catholic and poor that he is irritated about their plans. The father asks his son to "wait a while" before they get married. Oliver asks his father to define "a while." The father says, "Finish law school. If this is real, it can stand the test of time." Oliver replies, "It is real, but why in hell should I subject it to some arbitrary test?" With that, Oliver III wields his ultimate weapon at his son: "Marry her now, and I will not give you the time of day." To which the son says, "Father, you don't know the time of day," and Oliver walks out on his father, knowing the consequences of his actions.

The sentimentality of the story is partly because of the subsequent diagnosis of Jennifer's leukemia and her early death, the stoic way she behaved through her brief illness, and the resolution of Oliver's family problems. The themes are timeless, with Romeo and Juliet and West Side Story as two famous examples of the lovers from families which are not compatible. The novel is built on a number of cliches about romance, but these are part of the appeal to young people who want to believe the myths.

This rationale will focus on style, themes, and student use of the novel, with a response to objections which censors have to Love Story.

STYLE:

The novel is easy to read with the use of dialogue to carry the story and including few descriptions. The novel moves quickly, relating only incidents which move the story forward. The book is only one hundred twenty-five pages, making it a popular selection for required book reports.

The first page gets the reader's attention: "What can you say about a twenty-five-year-old girl who died?" The story is told from Oliver IV's point of view as he recalls his relationship with Jennifer, how it began and how it progressed to that beginning statement. Recollection as a device for telling the story is one which English teachers will want their students to notice, and the use of the male character as the narrator of a contemporary romance will provide a basis for comparison with other romances.

The sex scenes in the novel are suggested and not explicit. Oliver's roommate and other male friends show a great interest in how his sex life is progressing. A system is used to let Oliver's roommate know when Jennifer is in their room, but the novel does not go into detail about the activities involved.

The same cannot be said about the language that is used by both Jennifer and Oliver. It is sarcastic, irreverent, and profane. It is appropriate for the characterizations, but it is considered offensive by those who look at the words rather than for the attitudes the words reflect.

THEMES:

The love theme is dominant with the stereotyped sacrifice of the woman giving up her career and her scholarship to put her husband through law school. "Love conquers all" is a popular myth which is reinforced in this novel. Romance will carry its participants through all tribulations. The loss of family or money is no obstacle if the couple is really in love.

The conflict of values at different levels of society is the basis for the novel as well as the conflict between father and son. The reunion of the father and son at the end of the story provides the young reader with the hope that life is really like that.

Young readers will be interested in the relationship of Jennifer and Oliver to their respective families. Jennifer is adored by her father whom she calls Phil. He is loving, caring, concerned, and poor. Jennifer is able to communicate with him and they have a good relationship. Oliver, on the other hand, comes from a wealthy family, has all the material things he wants, but seems deprived of real love. There is a lack of communication in the family with the mother (called "Tipsy," hardly a flattering nickname) trying to keep the peace between her husband and son. The mother is a nonentity in the book: the father, as seen through his son's eyes, is bull-headed and unfeeling. The forgiveness scene at the end of the book would make that perception false, but many young people will identify with this problem.

Death is a popular theme in novels for young adults, and this is especially true when the heroine is young, beautiful, and very much in love. Young readers wonder how they would react in a similar situation. The 1984 Academy-award winning movie, "Terms of Endearment," handled the death of the heroine in a manner similar to Love Story. Many other young adult novels deal with the death theme, making the treatment of the theme a good discussion topic.

Less important, but certainly an underlying theme, is the importance placed on education and studying. When Oliver is appointed to the Law Review, it is a cause for celebration. His life as a law student is not glamorized. Because of their stringent financial condition, their lifestyle as graduate students is not portrayed as something unrealistically easy or fun. Oliver's career goals may be an interesting side issue for some readers.

The role of women in the novel should be mentioned. Jennifer's mother is dead, Oliver's mother is a shadow in her husband's life, and Jennifer gives up her scholarship and career for her marriage. She is a strong character in many ways, and young people will want to discuss her options in today's society as compared to 1970. After their first quarrel, Jennifer tells Oliver, "Love means not ever having to say you're sorry." She is capable of forgiveness and teaches this to Oliver. After her death, he is able to forgive his father.

STUDENT USE OF THE NOVEL:

Love Story should certainly be on the shelves of the school library. Often rerun as a television movie, Love Story will be familiar to many students who will want to read the book. Since it is easy to read with no complex plot or difficult concepts, it is more appropriate for independent or small group reading rather than for a class novel. The themes of the novel have universal appeal. English teachers will find the book useful when planning thematic units on love, death, and family relationships. Because of the myths surrounding love and romance in our society, the book would provide a basis for discussions and comparisons with other literature or television and movies. The use of dialogue for development of the characters and the narrator's memory for the structure of the story will be of interest to English teachers and their students. The dilemma of forgiveness and "saving face" is an important aspect of the novel.

This novel has enough appeal that it will continue to be read and enjoyed by many readers. The values in the novel outweigh the problems of explicit language which have been discussed. Knowing which students will be shocked by the language, the teacher can guide readers to the book who will not be distracted by this.

Reputable sources that have recommended this book are Library Journal, Newsweek, New York Times Book Review, Horn Book, and Atlantic.

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[1] Harper and Row, Publishers, 1970.

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Manchild in a World Where You Just Might Make It

Rationale for teaching Claude Brown's Manchild in the Promised Land to High School Students

It was Harlem in 1954. Claude Brown had just run into his friend Danny recently back from Kentucky where he had been treated for heroin addiction. Although this was the third time Danny had tried the cure, he convinced Claude that this time he was off the stuff and he was going to stay off. There was something different in Danny's determination to make a success of his life without the drug and the social climate of which it was a part. Danny was in his early twenties and Claude was a very mature and very experienced seventeen. In anguish, the friends spoke of the waste the drug was making of Harlem's youth and the odds against a recovery such as Danny's. Finally Brown wailed, "Damn, man, if you could write something about this or talk to the younger cats comin' up, it might stop somebody, turn 'em around" (p. 250).[1]

Danny convinced his young friend, temporarily at least, that writing about it wouldn't cause anybody to reject the drug culture if all the real life examples on the streets of Harlem couldn't. Within a decade, however, Brown was indeed writing not only about the disastrous effects of heroin—smack, dugi, shit, stuff—on young city blacks, but about the disastrous effects of coming up in a complex city culture cut off from race memory and deprived of any conclusive identity within that culture. In Manchild in the Promised Land Brown did not tell of hopelessness alone but of hope as well, of ways city blacks create identity for themselves and escape the self-fulfilling prophesy that growing up black in a city ghetto is a hopeless cycle of poverty, deprivation and alienation.

It is this tale of a vital, sometimes dangerous, sometimes wasted, segment of American life that well-meaning parents have from time to time since its 1965 publication sought to remove from high school library shelves, sought to expunge from high school curricula. And glancing through the pages or reading only the first hundred pages or so, one can see why parents might think the book unfit for teenage consumption. The pages are filled with language the dominant culture finds objectionable. They are also replete with stories of young prostitutes and younger professional thieves, of hungry children forced to steal their food while their mother spends her welfare money on liquor, of a favored character named Pimp because an independent prostitute provided taxi fare for his mother to deliver him in a hospital. The infant Pimp was, after all, the first man to take her hard earned money.

The book, an autobiography, recounts the childhood and youth of Claude Brown who before he was seven had mastered successful hookey playing and shoplifting, before he had passed thirteen was a successful thief and knew the safest fences, had been chain whipped and had almost died from a gun shot wound sustained while stealing bedsheets to pawn. By fifteen Brown was a veteran of several years as a drug dealer, and he had learned the ropes of living successfully in reform school—each term being like a vacation for him because, in the company of his similarly sentenced friends, he was, for a time, relieved of having to prove himself on the streets. To Brown, mastery of crime was the way to the top. He wasn't forced into this type of life; he chose it because it got him the recognition he wanted, the identity he needed: Claude Brown set out to be a "bad nigger."

On the surface young Claude had no reason to turn to street life. His family was intact, both his parents were regularly employed, and his was not a family wracked by alcohol abuse or serial mates. So it was for many of his street-wise friends. Though Brown does present the picture of the broken homes and dire poverty often associated with American black culture, he and many of his associates did not have such excuses for their decision to turn to the streets. Even so, by the end of Brown's autobiography when he was only twenty-one, most of his childhood associates were dead—of knifings, of overdoses, of suicide—or hopelessly "strung out" on heroin.

Why then would anyone want to teach this book in a high school?

To begin with, it introduces most students to a culture they could not possibly understand in any other way. A culture capable of wreaking violence on itself and on the society, a culture that induces hatred, bewilderment and rabid prejudice in those who cannot understand. Reading the book, we not only learn the story of Claude Brown's bizarre boyhood as a child adult; if we pursue it to the end and if we read carefully, we learn why young Harlemites seek the form of recognition, of belonging, Claude sought. We become thoroughly familiar with an isolated group of American people in but not of the American culture. And the twenty-year old volume remains vital. Near the end of the book Brown explains, "There are so many things about Harlem that have changed, and they don't seem possible for Harlem. I suppose no one who has ever lived in a Harlem of the world could ever imagine that it could change so drastically and yet maintain so much of its old misery" (p. 402). Brown could still make that statement today. The changes in Harlem since the mid-sixties remain only superficial, and black youngsters are still choosing crime and drug abuse as alternatives to seeking out the promise of the American dream.

But Brown does not show us only the negative side of Harlem existence. Though most of his friends do succumb to the pressures of cultural alienation, though the possibilities are bleak, some do endure, some even prevail. There was "Tony" (Brown used ficticious names for the street people he wrote about) who successfully avoided the drug culture, the crime, who successfully worked and lived outside of Harlem and its temptations, but who did finally commit suicide because outside his own culture he had no identity. Danny is a better success story. He kicked the habit, and several years after his triumphant cure he continued to work and live the middle-class life with family, religion and house in Harlem. There was Turk who made it big in boxing. There were Claude's sisters and his childhood sweetheart, Jackie, who married and set up stable homes for their children. And there was Claude's brother Pimp who was, when the book was published, fighting the same battle Danny had won. Pimp was likely to succeed because like Danny and Claude, he had found who he wanted to be—or at least the determination not to be what he didn't want to be. He had found an identity.

Brown himself learned early—and he teaches his readers—that the satisfaction he received from being a leader in street crime was hollow, that, for him at least, there had to be something else. He was aided in his rejection of the street life by a fortunate accident. His first and only experiment with heroin turned out to be a "bad trip" fraught with painful vomiting and violent pain, and he did not soon want to experience that again. More important, however, than his rejection of heroin was his recognition at fifteen that, unless he changed his ways before he reached sixteen, he would have great difficulty finding that something else. He knew—and he makes very clear to his readers—that as long as he was being sent to reform schools, his future was fairly safe, but that once he reached sixteen, reform school days were over. He knew that once he was sent to jail, he would have a "sheet on him," and that a jail record would deprive him of those limited opportunities available to ghetto blacks. And so he quit. He stopped stealing, he refused to carry a weapon and he abjured drugs—first only heroin, and later he gave up cocaine as well and finally marijuana—as crutches a true citizen of our culture does not need.

Even having rejected drugs and having given up the street scene, life would not be easy for Claude. Through the book we are given insight into the difficulties Harlem people (and people from ethnic ghettos all over America) face when they venture out. To hold a job in the white world, to work out in a non-segregated but nevertheless white gym, Claude, for whom an innate affinity for language provided an advantage denied to most people, had to mask his natural behavior and speech patterns:

> Everyplace I looked I wasn't understood. I felt like a misfit on just about every job I went to...I always had to find out where I was and what things were like. I always wanted to run. It was so difficult...There was still the language problem. The Harlem dialect was something that I was a little afraid to use...I knew these were gray boys [white men], and I felt I had to be careful around them or else I might frighten them...I was careful to pronounce my rs and say "you are" and "you're not." I'd say, "Hello. How are you?" very properly. Occasionally somebody would say, "Hi, How you doin'?" and I'd feel ridiculous. There was always this uncertainty, this thing of feeling your way through. I became aware that I was a new thing. The average cat who ventured out of Harlem would be afraid and run back. It was safer dealing drugs or doing something like that (p. 288).

And there were difficulties with so-called liberal whites. Quite by happenstance, Claude's first love was a white student at the night school where he completed high school after he had dropped out in Harlem. She was the daughter of liberal, tolerant Jews—at least so she thought and taught Claude to believe. Even so, he was wary enough always to meet her away from home, never to be introduced to her parents. As it turned out, his instincts were correct. Once her parents stumbled onto the racial identity of their daughter's friend, they shipped her away to live with distant relatives. Again white middle-class readers are invited to contemplate restrictions faced by American blacks which most of them will never have the opportunity to experience first hand.

Not only could high school students learn from this book about a culture most of them will never experience, about the evils of drugs, the hollowness of the street life and the difficulties members of America's minority groups experience when they venture out of their own little world; they learn of the institutions America's alienated devise to deal with their alienation. Claude was tempted to cast his lot with the Coptic religion, with the Black Muslims, with black Christianity all of which are baffling and sometimes threatening to American whites and probably to non-urban blacks as well. And with each of Claude's experiences, we gain a little bit of inside insight into these mysterious forms of expression which can go a long way toward creating understanding between America's two largest ethnic groups. Perhaps more important, we pick up a few more tools with which to seek understanding of Hispanic and Asian minorities as well. Any reading young white and non-urban Americans can do that helps to demystify these "strange" groups for them is a step toward American unity—a step away from prejudice, suspicion and discrimination.

High school students can find everything Claude Brown offers in sociology textbooks, drug education programs and linguistic training, but no lesson is so well taught as it is with concrete examples, and no textbook is so vivid as Claude Brown's prose. In 1965, Manchild in the Promised Land was greeted with almost universal critical acclaim, but there were exceptions. One reviewer charged that this book was written with "a vocabulary of a couple of hundred words and phrases—not a language at all but an impoverished patois...an argot [that] makes for a literary disaster."[2] A limited vocabulary, maybe, but certainly not a literary disaster. Brown has written in the language of the streets, the language he was afraid to use in white society precisely because he feared such responses as the one above. In so doing, he has made his message accessible both to the young blacks he so wants to help and to young whites. The very plain words and phrases he uses make for fast and enjoyable reading, and they make the material so very immediate. Parental objections have been raised to the book's language itself. That is because, in the dialogue, Brown has accurately recorded street language with all its propensity for the so-called "four letter words." Only by so doing can he tell his story with all its vivid detail, and he certainly has not introduced American middle-class youth to any words they haven't already learned from their friends and the walls of public restrooms. He doesn't condone such language, and he seldom uses it himself in the narrative. He merely represents his culture as he lived it.

The fiction of James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison is often taught in high schools and colleges to introduce black culture and black anger, and it is a wonderful introduction. Baldwin and Ellison have written classics of American literature, and they deserve recognition in the literature course. But, because they are creating fictional worlds and because they demand the interpretive skill required for reading literature, they have not the immediacy of Brown's simple account of his young life. The Invisible Man (Ellison), one of our great novels, is so filled with the figurative, with a stream of consciousness and with fantasy that it is accessible only to the top high school students. Another Country (Baldwin) is so full of resentment and hatred that it could do more to alienate white readers than to win their understanding. Manchild in the Promised Land is neither of these. Brown's prose is clear and accessible to the average reader, and his anger is youthful anger at circumstances, not resentment toward the whites. The book is dedicated to Eleanor Roosevelt who founded accepting and encouraging schools for black kids in trouble, and alongside the black heroes of Brown's conversion from gang member to useful society member, stands one white adviser who had perhaps as much influence as anybody. Brown is not prejudiced. He prefers black company where he can be comfortable with his own language, his own culture. But he recognizes that whites also are individuals and that race prejudice is not a foregone conclusion.

The message in the book is subtle. Brown does not often spell out his judgments. Both the negative effects of the culture in which street crime is the highest form of attainment and the hope that exists even when a young addict seems to be so lost that his friends speak of him in the past tense are implicit. The message is certainly clear enough that no teenagers are going to read it and rush out to try hookey playing, shoplifting and drugs for themselves, but it's much more complex than most young people will recognize on a first cursory reading. They will certainly learn that heroin is destructive and that Claude Brown saved himself from cultural burial. But to get all of the myriad sociological lessons in the book requires more careful and structured reading. For that reason Manchild in the Promised Land belongs in the classroom where a wiser head can lead young minds to see all of the implications of Brown's youth for young blacks and for themselves in a plural culture.

NOTES

[1] Quotations taken from Claude Brown, Manchild in the Promised Land (New York: MacMillan Publishers, 1965) will hereafter be cited in the text by page number only.

[2] Quoted in Book Review Digest, 1965, p. 160 from a review by Warren Miller in Saturday Review, Vol. 48 (August 28, 1965), p. 49.

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Supporting Traditional Values:
My Darling, My Hamburger

My Darling, My Hamburger went through twenty-one printings between 1969 and 1977, the date of the edition used for this review. It is pleasing that a book which so gracefully illustrates the traditional values of our society should be so popular among young people. This book makes clear that wise family support is all important if young people are to have a good life, and that wealthy family life is not necessarily advantageous. It emphasizes that outer beauty is not nearly so important as inner good sense. It makes clear the judgment of the writer that sex before marriage is likely to lead to great trouble. Still, another important message in the book is that abortion is terribly wrong—murder in fact.

These traditional moral values are well illustrated by the various characters and events in the book. The main characters include four young people whose families in various ways demonstrate how important good family life is. Maggie illustrates several of the major themes. Her family is a wisely loving family though not greatly affluent. Her mother makes clear that cosmetic attractiveness is unimportant for genuine love by saying that her bald-headed husband is no fashion plate, but he loves her. That is why she will do such dirty jobs as cleaning the kitchen oven. Maggie herself has plain brown hair and doesn't have the most fashionable clothing. But Maggie sails through the last year of high school successfully in spite of her inner qualms. She resists the sexual pressures of boys; she realizes how much her mother loves her, that baggy green sweaters tell nothing about the wearer. In short, she achieves a high degree of maturity and serves as an attractive role model to the many readers of this book.

Liz, who is the most beautiful girl in the class, a blond with beautiful hair and good clothing, comes from a family that does not offer her wisely supporting love. Her stepfather probably does not love her at all. Her mother loves her, but not wisely. Liz goes with the most attractive young man in the class, who comes from a wealthy family, but who in the end lets her down terribly.

Liz's boyfriend Sean makes her pregnant. He promises to marry her but then gives her money for an abortion. But he knows that abortion is wrong and writes a theme in an English class in which it is made clear that abortion is murder and that he has participated in murdering a baby.

The book shows how important is the role that Sean's father plays in Sean's cruel treatment of Liz. He attempts to talk to his father about Liz being pregnant. His father suggests an abortion, thinking that Sean is asking for another boy, a friend.

Sean says, "Suppose he loves her?" His father replies that marriage for a high school graduate would cancel any chance for college and success in life. He says, "Christ, if it was you and that little blond you are running around with, I would slap you right across the face...tell your friend to give that girl of his a kick in the behind and get it over with. A man's got to protect himself."

Sean's father then says to him, "Why doesn't he ask his own father?" Ironically, Sean replied, "He can't talk to him."

Maggie has the last word about Sean. During the graduation ceremony she sees Sean: "He'd have his punishment, she thought. For the rest of his life he'd remember Liz. He could go on to college and date dozens of other girls. He could get married and have children—but from time to time he'd remember. Just before going to sleep, perhaps, in a dream. He'd have to remember Liz and something he couldn't be very proud of. The past wasn't that easy to get away from."

Dennis, who dates Maggie, also has a father to whom he cannot talk. Dennis' father is more concerned about carrying out the garbage and protecting the lawn than the inner life of his son.

The wisdom with which Maggie's mother talked to Maggie is in sharp contrast to the other parents and teachers in the book. The title refers to the useless advice a teacher gives in a class when a girl asks her how to "stop a guy on the make." The reply: "Suggest going to get a hamburger."

Thus by contrasting the two girls and their families, the author of this book has written a morality lesson for our time, showing that family life is all important for supporting young people in their transition from childhood to adulthood. The book also contradicts the notion so prevalent in our culture that outer beauty or appearance is all important and that wealthy families are advantageous for young people. The book is powerfully supportive to girls in urging them to resist the sexual pressures that are so vigorous in our society by making clear how tragic is the situation of the teenage pregnant girl.

The book has no explicit sex scenes; it has no four-letter words. The most suggestive scene (in which a boy attempts to open the back of a girl's dress) ends with the girl pressing a thumb tack into the boy's neck, a new weapon for self-defense for girls.

The book on the whole is a good illustration of the statement by our greatest religious poet, John Milton, in his essay, the Areopagitica, that "in books we may safely scout out the regions of sin and evil." This book portrays powerfully the contrast between two girls, one of whom yields to temptation and suffers, the other, the heroine, who resists temptation and grows up in a quietly admirable way. A library that removed this book would, if consistent, have to remove hundreds of other books that have the same traditional themes and realistic manner of presentation.

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Why Nineteen Eighty-Four Should Be Read and Taught

George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four has been challenged on such grounds as profanity, immorality, and obscenity. It has been charged with being Communistic, containing sex references, and being depressing. Some of these charges are absurd, and though some have a grain of truth when items are taken out of context, on the whole the book stands up well and though frequently challenged has a history of rarely being removed from classrooms and libraries. Critics, as well as readers in general, have recognized the book as significant and valuable since its appearance at the end of the 1940's. Some examples: On the dust jacket of the first American edition of Nineteen Eighty-Four Bertrand Russell and Alfred Kazin are quoted. Russell states, "Nineteen Eighty-Four depicts . . . the horrors of a well-established totalitarian regime of whatever type . . . with great power and skill and force of imagination." He adds that it is important that we should be aware of these dangers. Alfred Kazin characterizes the book as "an extraordinary experience . . . overwhelming in its keenness and prophetic power." He further comments: "I hardly know which to praise more—Orwell's insight into the fate of man under totalitarianism, or his compassion for him." Reasons for reading and teaching Nineteen Eighty-Four continue today to be much the same as these critics gave three and a half decades ago.

The book does express a mood of near but not complete despair. The mood is despair only if readers do not heed the warning of what will happen if we continue on some of our present courses. But we do not have to become soulless automatons. It is not foreordained. The scenerio of Nineteen Eighty-Four is that atomic wars had started in the 1940's, accelerated ten years later in Russia, Western Europe, and North America. This atomic war led the governments (Eurasia, Oceania, and Eastasia) to conclude that unless atomic wars stopped, organized society would be doomed. Of course, this would also mean the end of governmental power. Thus atomic war stopped, but bombs continued to be stockpiled awaiting the right time to kill a large segment of the world's population without warning in a few seconds. Orwell portrays this continued military preparedness as essential also for the continuation of the economic system and shows the consequences of a society in a constant state of war readiness, always afraid of being attacked.

As Erich Fromm says in the Afterword to the 1961 New American Library paperback, "Orwell's picture is so pertinent because it offers a telling argument against the popular idea that we can save freedom and democracy by continuing the arms race and finding a 'stable' deterrent." (p. 262) With technical progress geometrically progressing, the caves will never be deep enough to protect us.

The novel begins on a bright cold day in April, "and the clocks were striking thirteen." From there on a world is presented that is permeated by fear and hate with such slogans as HATE WEEK, WAR IS PEACE, FREEDOM IS SLAVERY, IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH. The society has nothing like our first amendment. Everything is censored by the MINISTRY OF TRUTH. It is even a crime to keep a diary and Winston Smith's life is endangered by doing so. Ironically Winston is employed by the MINISTRY OF TRUTH, and his job is to constantly rewrite history. Government predictions which do not come true (and they never do) are made to disappear. And, of course, people have to be made to disappear too (to become nonpersons) if they commit THOUGHT CRIME, which the THOUGHT POLICE are to control. BIG BROTHER affirms that: "Who controls the past controls the future: Who controls the present controls the past." The following extended quotation from the book demonstrates in some detail how this control of the past was accomplished:

> As soon as all the corrections which happened to be necessary in any particular number of the Times had been assembled and collated, that number would be reprinted, the original copy destroyed, and the corrected copy placed in the files in its stead. This process of continuous alteration was applied not only to newspapers, but to books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, films, sound tracks, cartoons, photographs—to every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any political or ideological significance. Day by day and almost minute by minute the past was brought up to date. In this way every prediction made by the Party could be shown by documentary evidence to have been correct; nor was any item of news, or any expression of opinion, which conflicted with the needs of the moment, ever allowed to remain on record. All history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as was necessary. In no case would it have been possible, once the deed was done, to prove that any falsification had taken place. The largest section of the Records Department, far larger than the one in which Winston worked, consisted simply of persons whose duty it was to track down and collect all copies of books, newspapers, and other documents which had been superseded and were due for destruction. (pp. 40-41)

A few cubicles away from Winston is Ampleforth, who juggles rhymes and meters, producing garbled versions of poems which have become ideologically offensive but for one reason or another are to be retained in anthologies. There is also a whole army of reference clerks who spend all of their time preparing lists of books and magazines to be recalled. There are also huge warehouses where corrected documents are stored and furnaces where original copies are burned.

By controlling all information BIG BROTHER controls responses of citizens, primarily through the giant two-way TV screens in every living space. These permit THOUGHT POLICE to observe all citizens to see that they are responding in a desirable manner—hating enemies and loving BIG BROTHER. Reality control, DOUBLETHINK in NEWSPEAK, means an "unending series of victories over our memory."

In Nineteen Eighty-Four orthodoxy means not thinking or even needing to think. It is unconsciousness. Orthodoxy is to close the book. One of the U.S. Supreme Court justices in the recent Island Trees case talks about censorship resulting in a "pall of orthodoxy." One of the functions of literature in a free society is to help protect us from this "pall of orthodoxy." This book is one of the best examples of a work of considerable literary merit worth reading and studying in the classroom as part of a protection program against the orthodoxy pall. It is also a very interesting study of the effects of an orthodoxy that finally convinces Winston Smith, a party member who opposes the system, that four is five. It takes brain-washing and torture by the MINISTRY OF LOVE to accomplish this convincing. Winston's final orthodoxy is: "Whatever the Party holds to be true is truth. It is impossible to see reality except by looking through the eyes of the Party."

In answer to the question of why this particular novel to study the relationship between totalitarianism, technology, psychology, and language instead of a social studies, science, or language text, Roy Orgren, writing in the Fall 1983 Connecticut English Journal, says:

> Simply because, set forth in a work of fiction, the ideas are more accessible, more interrelated, and more engaging; the sheer horror of totalitarianism is more real. We flinch when the truncheon-wielding guards in the MINISTRY OF LOVE crack Winston's fingers and shatter his elbow; we writhe in our armchairs as O'Brien virtually disembodies Winston with electric shocks; we shudder as moist pads are applied to Winston's temples; and we, like Winston, are dazed by the 'devastating explosion,' ' the blinding flash of light' which so numbs his mind that he consents to seeing—no, actually sees—five fingers when only four are held to him." (p. 141)

We are jolted out of our complacency so that it is likely that we will never slacken our vigil against oppression and human rights violations.

Orwell, with his presiding interest in language, shows how BIG BROTHER manipulates society and controls reality by corrupting language. NEWSPEAK is calculated to get rid of individuality by limiting the range of thought through cutting the choice of words to a minimum. As Syme, the NEWSPEAK expert, says, "You think, I dare say, that our chief job is inventing new words. But not a bit of it! We're destroying words—scores of them, hundreds of them, every day. We're cutting the language down to the bone. The Eleventh Edition won't contain a single word that will become obsolete before the year 2050." (p. 51)

Studying the effects of NEWSPEAK can only help us in cherishing our language with all of its rich diversity and ambiguities. Valuable, exciting classroom discussion and writing projects can grow from this, and surely the lesson of the importance of using language that is not vague and misleading but clear and precise can be learned.

Another major emphasis of the novel is the use of technology combined with advertising techniques (especially by the government) that are deeply psychological to eliminate individuality and privacy. Many of the same techniques used in Nineteen Eighty-Four are in use today in our world, and many of them have become much more sophisticated. We surely have full-wall TV screens and the two-way television. Closed circuit security systems are not just for banks anymore. In fact, they are practically everywhere. Heartbeat, respiration, surface tension of the skin, stiffness of hair, and temperatures can be measured remotely by voltage sensors and untrasensitive microphones. Our government puts out a glut of newspeak. It is significant that NCTE's Doublespeak Award has twice been awarded to Ronald Reagan. The number of records, many kept without our knowledge, on each of us stored in computers, retrievable in seconds by almost any person or organization with the knowhow, is frightening. Behavior modification and drug therapy are widely used. Studying about these technologies and techniques, discussing them, exposing them, can make students aware in a way that may serve to make them less vulnerable to these techniques.

Perhaps the most interesting and discussable feature of Orwell's novel is its description of the nature of truth. Is there an objective truth, or is "reality" not external? Does it exist only subjectively and internally? Is it reality that what the Party holds to be truth is truth? The Party believes that truth is only in the mind and that by controlling the mind truth is controlled. Controlling minds and truth is ultimate power. Truth is subordinated to the Party. As Erich Fromm says, "It is one of the most characteristic and destructive developments of our own society that man, becoming more and more of an instrument, transforms reality more and more into something relative to his own interests and functions. Truth is proven by the consensus of millions; to the slogan 'how can millions be wrong' is added 'and how can a minority of one be right.' " (Afterword, p 264) The "one" must be insane. The "consensus truth" concept can serve as the basis for much valuable discusssion about many things such as individuality, minority rights, majority rule, and, of course, values.

It is hard to imagine a modern novel that has more reasons to be read and taught. In addition to its literary merit, it has special implications for our times and the society toward which we may be heading. Its depiction of a well-established totalitarian regime, a nuclear stand-off with a world in constant fear, total censorship, NEWSPEAK, DOUBLETHINK, orthodoxy, and consensus truth offer almost sure-fire topics for discussion and writing in classes—discussions that can serve to foster sincere thinking and maturity. Yes, the book is depressing, but readers can react to that by trying to do positive things to influence the future rather than becoming more depressed and pessimistic. Nineteen Eighty-Four teaches us, as Erich Fromm says at the end of his essay, "the danger with which all men are confronted today, the danger of a society of automatons who will have lost every trace of individuality, of love, of critical thought, and yet who will not be aware of it because of 'doublethink'. Books like Orwell's are powerful warnings." (p. 267)

Critical language involving reading, thought, and discussion of books like Nineteen Eighty-Four may help us to avoid Winston's fate of total loss of self, of humanity, as presented in the last paragraph of the novel:

> He gazed up at the enormous face. Forty years it had taken him to learn what kind of smile was hidden beneath the dark mustache. O cruel, needless misunderstanding! O stubborn, self-willed exile from the loving breast! Two gin-scented tears trickled down the sides of his nose. But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother. (p. 300)

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A Teachable Good Book: Of Mice and Men

There is one good reason for reading John Steinbeck's short novel Of Mice and Men—it is a very good book.

There is one good reason for teaching it—it is a teachable good book: simple and clear, yet profound and beautiful.

Of Mice and Men is a book to use to show beginning readers the paths to greater books which might at first be too difficult for them. This short book is easy—in the accessible sense. But it is not "easy" in the moral sense: it raises large issues of the sort raised in and by the greatest and often more difficult literature .

For Of Mice and Men is a Tragedy, a tragedy not in the narrow modern sense of a mere 'sad story' (though it certainly is that), but a tragedy in the classic Aristotelian/Shakespearean sense of showing humanity's achievement of greatness through and in spite of defeat.

Some people seem to believe that the function of literature is to provide vicarious "happy endings," to provide in words a sugary sweetness we would like to have but cannot always get in real life. To such people, true literary tragedy is distasteful. But the greatest writers and the best readers know that literature is not always only mere sugar candy; it can sometimes be a strong medicine: sour perhaps—at least to the untrained taste—but necessary for continued health:

> Take it; if the smack is sour,
> The better for the bitter hour.
>
> (A.E. Housman)

Some readers may object to the book's presentation of low class characters, vulgar language, scenes suggestive of improper sexual conduct, and an implied criticism of the social system. But none of this is presented indecently, or beyond the ordinary norms of contemporary literature. Compared to many modern works, (or to movies and TV) this book is tame indeed. Furthermore, these features are necessary in this book in two ways.

First, they are part of the accurate precise reporting of the reality of a particular time and place and environment. Part of Steinbeck's literary point is that this is true to life. As such, the dirty details are part of Steinbeck's enlargement of the realm of Tragedy, the democratization of the tragic world. Traditionally, the subjects of Tragedies have been Kings and other Great Ones: Job, Oedipus, Lear. But Steinbeck's point—a truly American point—is that all men are created equal: Tragedy exists even among the lowly of the earth; even the least of us—even a Lennie or a George—has the human potential for tragic nobility. Of Mice and Men is a tragedy in the modern tradition of The Hairy Ape and Death of a Salesman.

Second, the grossness is a way of presenting briefly the complex turmoil of life. This book is not stereotype melodrama. It is not a simple-minded book. There are no purely bad people in it. Conversely, there are no purely good people in it either. All the characters are complex mixtures of good and bad, or rather of bad results from good intentions. They are all—in their ability and in their outlook—limited. And they live in a gross and dirty world. Given their position in that world, they are not able to achieve much. But they are trying to do the best they can; they are trying to be good people and to have good lives. They have good intentions. They have noble aims.

The tragedy is that, limited as the characters are, the world they live in is even more limited; it is a world in which the simplest dream of the simplest man—poor dumb big Lennie—cannot come true. "The best laid plans of mice and men gang oft a-glae [go oft a-stray]," wrote Robert Burns in the poem which provides the book's title and its theme. And Steinbeck's story shows why: The best laid plans go oft astray because they come in conflict with one another. The simplest good intention—simply to stay alive—of a simple mouse, a simple pup, a simple young woman, is thwarted by Lennie's urge to pet something soft and beautiful. Lennie's drive to touch beauty kills the things he loves.

But his problem is the same problem that bothers Curley, the Boss's son, the closest thing to a villain in the book. Like Lennie, Curley doesn't know how to hold on to what he finds important: his young wife, his status as the Boss's son, his reputation as a man. He loses each by trying to hold on too tightly. Curley's aim to be a respected husband/boss/man is foiled by his own limited abilities.

The similar but simpler aim of Lennie and George to have a small place of their own where they can "live offa the fatta the lan' " is doomed to frustration also by their own limitations and the tragic chain of circumstance and coincidence that ends with Lennie dead by George's hand.

The point, of course, is that they all—we all—live in a too limited world, a world in which not all our dreams can come true, a world in which we—all of us some of the time and some of us all the time—are doomed to disappointment. The tragic dilemma is that for our basic humanity, for the goodness of our aims, we all deserve better than we get. But because of our human limitations, by our weaknesses of character, none of us is ever good enough to earn what we deserve. Some philosophers, seeing this dilemma, pronounce profound pessimism for humanity. Some religions promise for this world's disappointments supernatural intercession and other-worldly compensations. The tragic viewpoint (the view of Shakespeare, the Greek tragedians, the Old Testament Job, and John Steinbeck) finds in it the chance for nobility of soul: even in the blackest of disappointments, a human can achieve individual greatness. One may be defeated physically—but one need not be crushed spiritually. One can remain true to one's dream and true to one's friend. We humans may die, but we can love one another.

Friendship: Love. That too is what Of Mice and Men is all about. Lennie and George, disparate types, are, against all good reason, friends. They share a good dream. They love one another. They are too limited, too inarticulate, to know how to say it, but they do show it—or rather Steinbeck shows it to us readers.

So the book treats the great themes of Dreams and Death and Love with simple powerful clarity. It does so with a classically elegant structure—another reason for using the book as a teaching tool: it allows a reader—especially an untrained or beginning reader of literature—to see (or be shown) how structure supports and presents content. Of Mice and Men has the classic situation/complication/twist/and/resolution plot structure uncluttered by diversions, distractions, or subplots. There is an inevitableness, a starkness that makes the point of the story unavoidable.

The story has the classic "unities" of time and place and action. It begins in a small spot of beautiful nature, a secluded camp in the woods by a stream; it moves to the buildings of a California ranch, and ends back in the woods by the stream.

The style is simple: clear, direct sentences of description and action, direct quotation of the speech of simple people. Few long words, no hard words.

The action is simple: two poor and vagrant workers, big, dumb Lennie and small, clever George, take jobs at a large ranch. Lennie has trouble with the Boss's son, Curley. Lennie accidentally—more or less—kills Curley's wife. George kills Lennie to save him from the horrors of a lynch mob led by Curley, bent on revenge.

The settings are simple in detail, and simply powerfully symbolic. The secluded spot in the woods by the stream is the uncomplicated world of Nature; the bunkhouse is the bleak home of hired working men trying to make sense of their lives and gain comfort in a limited environment; the barn is the place of working life, of seed and harvest, birth and death; the harness room with Crook's bunk symbolizes social constraints; the "little place of our own" about which George and Lennie dream and all too vaguely plan is the Paradise on earth we all hope for.

The characters, too, are simple yet significant. "Begin with an individual, and before you know it you find you have created a type," wrote F. Scott Fitzgerald; "begin with a type, and you find that you have created—nothing." Steinbeck begins with individuals: clearly and sharply crafted characters, a whole set of individuals who are so clearly realized that each —without surrendering individuality—becomes a type, an archetype, a universal character: There is Candy, the old, one-armed worker with no place to go, as useless as his toothless dog; there is Carlson, gruffly and deliberately "unfeeling," who can coolly kill old Candy's ancient dog simply because "he stinks" and "he ain't no good to you"; and there is Crooks, the dignified "proud and aloof" but helpless and lonely victim of racial discrimination. There is Slim, calm, reasonable, compassionate, the real leader of men. And there is Curley, the arrogant but inept Boss's son. The man who could lead well does not have the position; the one who has the position and the authority is not a true leader.

Curley hides his insecurities behind a mask of macho toughness. His competitive bravado makes him push too far and Lennie, after enduring much, is given permission by George to "get him." Lennie in self-protection crushes Curley's fist in his own big hand, crippling Curley somewhat as Candy and Crooks have been crippled by the punitive harshness of life.

Curley is also the one man who has a woman. But clearly he does not—does not know how to—relate to her as a person. She is to him a thing, a possession, a sex-object and a status symbol. For the men, in braggadocio, he flaunts the sexuality of the relationship; and yet, out of his own self-doubts he is intensely jealous of the men's awareness of her.

The young woman has no name—she is merely "Curley's wife." She knows she wants–and somehow deserves–something better than this. "I don't even like Curley," she says of her husband. She has gradiose ambitions of being a Hollywood star "in the pitchers." She is a lost little girl in a world of men whose knowledge of women is largely limited to memories of kind old ladies and rumors of casual prostitution. All these men are afraid of Curley's wife, afraid and aware that her innocent animal appeal may lead them into temptation and trouble. In self-protection they avoid her. Only Lennie, in naive goodness, actually relates to her as a person to a person. She talks to him. For a little time they share in their aesthetic sense; they both admire beauty. Unfortunately, she is too naive, and Lennie is too strong and clumsy. In trying—at her invitation—to pet her lovely hair he is panicked by her quick resistance, and ends by killing her. Just as he had earlier killed a puppy and a mouse. Curley's wife, a naive Romantic, wants love and tenderness in a harsh crude Naturalistic world; Lennie, big and ignorant, tries to give love. But he is too weak in the mind, too strong in the body. His tenderness is too powerful for weaker, unsuspecting creatures.

We readers can identify with Lennie. We sympathize; we empathize. We care. We have—most of us—been in his position: not quite able to cope with the complexities of the world around us, wanting only security, peace, comfort, and something soft and beautiful to pet and love.

Perhaps one reason that this book has evoked controversy and censorious action is that it is so simple and clear and easy to understand—and so painful! It hurts to read this book. And some people don't like their books to hurt them; they want soothing. But great Tragedy is meant to hurt. One needn't subscribe wholly to the Aristotelian doctrine of 'catharsis' by Art to see that one function of literature is to help us deal with the pain of real life by practicing with the vicarious pains of tragic art.

Of course Of Mice and Men contains unpleasant attitudes; there is brutality, racism, sexism, economic exploitation. But the book does not advocate them; rather it shows that these too-narrow conceptions of human life are part of the cause of human tragedy. They are forces which frustrate human aspiration.

Lennie and George have a noble dream. They are personally too limited to make it come true, but they do try. They try to help each other, and they even enlarge their dream to include old one-handed Candy and crippled black Crooks. Theirs is the American Dream: that there is somehow, somewhere, sometime, the possibility that we can make our Paradise on earth, that we can have our own self-sufficient little place where we can live off the fat of the land as peaceful friends.

What is sad, what is tragic, what is horrible, is that the Dream may not come true because we are—each and all of us—too limited, too selfish, too much in conflict with one another. "Maybe everybody in the whole damn world is scared of each other," says Slim. "Guys that go around...alone...don't have no fun. After a long time they get mean. They get wantin' to fight all the time."

What is ennobling in this tragedy of mice and men is the Revelation of a way beyond that loneliness and meanness and fighting, a way to rise above our human limitations: Two men—Lennie and George—who have nothing else, do have each other. "We kinda look after each other." says George. And they do have their Dream. And the Dream is there even in the final defeat. For in the end the one thing George can do for Lennie is to make sure he's happy as he dies. He has Lennie "look down acrost the river like you can almost see the place." And as Lennie says, "Let's get that place now," George kills him mercifully. It's a horrible thing to do, and George knows that. And we know that. But in this limited world in this limited way it is all that George can do for his friend. And he does it. That is the horror and the nobility which together make up Tragedy. The Tragic pattern closes. There is a sense of completeness, of both defeat and satisfaction.

In Of Mice and Men, Steinbeck has shown us something about the pain of living in a complex human world and created something beautiful from it: in true great literature the pain of Life is transmuted into the beauty of Art.

The book is worth reading for a glimpse of that beauty—and worth teaching as a way to show others how such beauty works.

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Defending Solzhenitsyn: *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*

Solzhenitsyn has not been faring well of late. So long as he remained in the Soviet Union, he enjoyed a certain amount of distinction in the West, the distinction that must necessarily be given to any Soviet intellectual who has the courage to tell the truth in the face of oppression. But heroes can be hard to live with, especially when their drama seems to be over. Let Andrei Sakharov move to Princeton, and our attention will soon turn to some other dissident, whose name is yet unsung. For such, at least, has been the case of Alexander Solzhenitsyn. When Solzhenitsyn first visited the United States in 1975, the year after he had been stripped of his citizenship and expelled from the Soviet Union, President Ford refused to receive him in the White House—a decision that caused his administration considerable embarassment at the time. But this may have been the only time Gerald Ford was in the vanguard of the American intelligentsia. When Solzhenitsyn gave the commencement speech at Harvard in 1976, he had the ill grace to condemn the shortcomings of detente and the decline of Western morality, prompting rebukes from the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Christian Science Monitor*. Solzhenitsyn headed north to Vermont and has been keeping a low profile ever since. The publication last year of the second volume of *August 1914* excited relatively little comment. And in some liberal circles admiration of Solzhenitsyn has become politically suspect—like admitting to a taste for Ayn Rand or G. K. Chesterton.

When I was first asked to contribute an essay on Solzhenitsyn to this volume, I assumed that any attempt to censor *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* must be politically motivated. This is, after all, a book about life in a Soviet concentration camp, and there are plenty of men and women in America who are still reluctant to admit that such camps exist.

But the controversy around *Ivan Denisovich* proves to be much simpler than this. Among those parents who would prevent the book from being taught, the most frequently voiced objection is that it "contains foul language." The words in question are "fucking" and "shit," both of which appear less than ten pages into the text, when they are used by guards in reference to the men whose lives they rule: "They don't know how to do a fucking thing . . . We ought to feed them on shit." (26) Much later in the book a trustee who stands guard over the mess hall taunts the prisoners by calling them "fuckers" and "shits." (131-132) Elsewhere in the book, a prisoner wonders if he should "fuck off" (105), and another says "fuck you." (106) In this same scene, when the prisoners are running the risk of missing roll call because they don't want to waste the mortar they are using to build a wall, their squad leader says, "To hell with the mortar." (105)

Condensed in this way into a single paragraph, the language may sound foul indeed. But I had to make a search for it. Within the context of the book as a whole, it is neither obtrusive nor pervasive. Indeed, it seems so natural that readers may easily overlook the few short passages which provide the "evidence" for those who want to censor the book. Had Solzhenitsyn, or his translator, insisted on male prisoners and guards, living under conditions that test the limits of survival, using words like "darn" or "nitwit," the effect would have been ridiculous. Dialogue of this sort is not realistic, and I don't see how anyone can even begin to imagine life in a concentration camp if the characters are unable to speak like men.

But any intelligent discussion of *Ivan Denisovich* must turn away from the examination of dialogue, diction, and style. I would no more like to defend the book for its use of four letter words than I would like to praise its use of such cliches as "chilled to the bone" (22) or "like water off a duck's back." (51) We cannot forget that we are dealing with a work that was originally composed in Russian, a language mastered by relatively few English teachers. Most of us know the book in translation only, usually Ralph Parker's in the New American Library edition. Anyone who has struggled with a foreign language realizes that translation is a tricky business, and translators can easily fall from grace. Constance Garnett was once a respected translator of Tolstoy, but her work has been superseded by that of more able linguists. Parker's translation of Solzhenitsyn may eventually fall into similar disrepute. I have used it for this paper because it is the most widely circulated. But we should note that this translation was sponsored by the Soviet government and originally appeared in the December 1962 *Moscow News*. In his well respected biography of Solzhenitsyn, published only a few months ago, Michael Scammell reminds us that Parker "responded to the prudishness of Soviet sensibilities by toning down some of Solzhenitsyn's saltier expressions" to such an extent that he was "accused of having exercised a political censorship of the text." (468) Comparing this translation to the rival translation by Max Hayward and Ronald Hingley, Scammell concludes that "neither was very satisfactory." (468) To defend Solzhenitsyn's language, when one has it only second hand, is to assume a critical position that can be challenged too easily. Solzhenitsyn may be a fine stylist with a good ear for dialogue, but it is difficult to argue this persuasively unless one reads Russian fluently. It would be wiser to rest our defense of the book on its moral and intellectual content, rather than the particular phrasing through which that content has been made available to us. And we should be ever mindful that our grasp of "content" is subject to reappraisal with each new translation.

There can be no doubt, however, that this is a deeply moral book and one of the central documents in the intellectual history of our times. And the values that this work advances should appeal to the very people who seem so eager to keep the book away from their teenage children. Distracted by a random phrase or two, such would-be censors overlook the fact that the book as a whole emphasizes the importance of self respect, hard work, and religious faith.

When Ivan Denisovich Shukhov awakens on the morning of the day the book will chronicle, he feels "feverish, with pains all over his body." (18) He feels so ill that he doubts he will be able to make it through the day, and he stays in bed a moment later than he should. As a punishment for failing to get up at reveille, he is sent to the guardhouse and ordered to wash the floor. The job proves to be easier than expected, and Shukhov begins to feel better: "now that he'd been given work to do, Shukhov's aches and pains seemed to have gone." (23) Nonetheless, he still goes to the camp infirmary, hoping to be put on the sick list. A medical assistant takes his temperature and reports that it reads 99.2 but that this is not sufficiently high to justify being excused from a full day's heavy manual labor outdoors in a Siberian winter. Even if Shukhov had been admitted to the infirmary, it's unlikely that he would have been allowed much rest. The doctor in charge, we learn:

> invented jobs in and around the infirmary for all the patients who could stand on their feet—fencing the garden, laying paths, bringing soil to the flowerbeds, and, in the wintertime, erecting snow barriers. Work, he said, was a first-rate medicine for any illness. (33)

At first glance, it might seem as if Solzhenitsyn is mocking the doctor in question, but only a few paragraphs later we learn that this physician is encouraging a dissident intellectual to write poetry under his protection: "The doctor wanted him to write in prison what he'd been given no opportunity to write in freedom" (34)—a line which suggests that the man is something more than a mindless martinet. And as the book unfolds, the importance of work therapy emerges as a major theme.

After a long march Shukhov's squad reaches the power station on which they've been assigned to work. As soon as Shukhov is given a specific task, he once again begins to feel better:

> And then every thought was swept out of his head. All his memories and worries faded. He had only one idea—to fix the bend in the stovepipe and hang it up to prevent it smoking. (65)

The most exciting part of Shukhov's day, and by extension the most dramatic scene in the book, is when he totally commits himself to building a brick wall—doing it not only quickly but also conscientiously. The scene runs for almost fourteen pages, during all of which it is clear that while Ivan Denisovich Shukhov may still be a prisoner, he is finding enormous satisfaction in his work. One citation in particular should be sufficient to illustrate this:

> And now Shukhov and the other masons felt the cold no longer. Thanks to the urgent work, the first wave of heat had come over them—when you feel wet under your coat, under your jacket, under your shirt and your vest. And they didn't stop for a moment; they hurried on with the laying. And after about an hour they had their second flush of heat, the one that dries up the sweat. Their feet didn't feel the cold, that was the main thing. Nothing else mattered. Even the breeze, light but piercing, couldn't distract them from the work. (96)

Even after the alarm sounds signaling the end of the shift, Shukhov continues to work frantically on, thoroughly engaged by the spirit of creation as he watches his wall take shape. Although he is told not to worry about using up his mortar, and that he should simply discard it, he is capable of doing no such thing:

> But Shukhov wasn't made that way—eight years in a camp couldn't change his nature. He worried about anything he could make use of, about every scrap of work he could do—nothing must be wasted without good reason. (105-106)

So determined is he to leave his work in order that he risks serious reprisals to look over the wall one last time before running to reach the men who have already assembled for the first of the nightly headcounts. As Solzhentisyn puts it, "if guards had put the dogs on him it would have made no difference." (106) This is a serious worker indeed.

Despite the corruption and brutality of the camp administration, the prisoners do receive some compensation for the work they do. Although they are unpaid, and virtually slave labor, their rations are slightly increased when they have worked hard—or at least persuaded the authorities that they have done so through carefully crafted work reports. The principal value of the work the prisoners do is spiritual, however, not material. Although an extra few ounces of bread can mean a great deal to men on a diet barely sufficient to support life, the prisoners have other means of increasing their meager comforts. Many receive packages from outside the camp—packages that are regularly pilfered by the guards but which nonetheless introduce occasional delicacies into the barracks: a sausage, for example, or a pot of real tea. These commodities can be bartered in what amounts to an underground economy to which poorer prisoners, like Shukhov, can gain access through a degree of private enterprise—mending slippers, or holding someone's place in line. Were the prisoners concerned only with their physical well-being, they would probably do less work for their captors and more work for themselves. There is certainly no reason to suppose that Ivan Denisovich and his fellow workers are ever likely to enjoy electric heating once the power station is complete.

But by totally immersing himself into the work of building a wall, Shukhov finds freedom for an afternoon. Work becomes a semi-mystical experience through which man can find himself by losing himself. In this respect Solzhenitsyn is the heir of a great nineteenth century tradition—found in Goethe, Carlyle, Marx, Tolstoy and Freud among others—that advocated work as a means of overcoming anxiety and self doubt. By becoming absorbed in what he is doing, Shukhov finds a degree of inner peace that many free men might envy.

That Solzhenitsyn intended his readers to recognize that work has spiritual significance is first suggested just before Shukhov's work day begins. A fellow prisoner, an old man with a gray beard, repaints Shukhov's identification number, prompting the narrator to observe: "When he painted the number on your hat with his brush it was just like a priest anointing your brow." (39) A few pages later, when Shukhov is being searched by guards prior to leaving camp for the work site, he thinks to himself: "Come on, paw me as hard as you like. There's nothing but my soul in my chest." (43-44) And moments later, all the prisoners listen as a guard recites the familiar orders known among themselves as the "morning prayer." (46)

Indeed, at the time of its publication, Ivan Denisovich surprised many readers, both in the East and the West, for containing numerous and usually positive references to religion. It is now well-known that Solzhenitsyn is a deeply religious man, but the publication of religious work is not encouraged in the Soviet Union—quite the contrary. One passage, in particular, was especially controversial within the U.S.S.R. Shukhov's squad leader, Tiurin, is telling the story of how he had been driven out of the Red Army because he was the son of a modestly wealthy man. The story makes it clear that he was treated badly by the army, and Tiurin finds satisfaction in having subsequently discovered that both his former regimental commander and commissar were executed in the great purge of 1937, when Stalin came close to destroying the officer corps of the entire army. This leads Tiurin to conclude the story with a line that caused many an eyebrow to rise in Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev:

> So I crossed myself and said: 'So, after all, Creator, You do exist up there in heaven. Your patience is long-suffering but You strike hard.' (87)

Coming from one of the most sympathetically drawn characters in the book, this passage seemed to tell Russian readers that notwithstanding the militant atheism of the Soviet state, God does exist, and divine retribution awaits the unjust.

But just as interesting, I think, are the spontaneous prayers that well up within Shukhov himself, a good and simple man. Only moments before he is about to be searched, he discovers that he has absent-mindedly brought back to camp a small piece of a broken hacksaw blade and immediately "an urgent prayer rose in his heart: 'O Lord, save me! Don't let them send me to the cells.' " And in apparent answer to this prayer, the guard who is about to discover the blade is momentarily distracted. The blade remains undiscovered, and Shukhov not only escapes detection but is rewarded: He is able to hide the blade back at the barracks, where he plans to turn it into a cobbler's knife with which he can earn a little money by doing shoe repairs.

Having made it successfully through this "one day," Shukhov's fever is altogether gone, and he is filled with internal peace. As he eats his bowl of thin watery stew, he reflects, "We'll survive. We'll stick it out, God willing, till it's over." (136) The pronoun reference here is obscure: "It" may refer simply to Shukhov's own sentence, but it may just as easily apply to the continued existence of a repressive Soviet state. And as Shukhov settles into his bunk just before going to sleep, he whispers a final prayer: "Glory be to Thee, O Lord. Another day over. Thank You I'm not spending tonight in the cells." (153)

This prayer is heard by Alyosha, the prisoner who sleeps in the adjoining bunk. Alyosha is a Baptist who has been imprisoned because of his religious beliefs, and he is, at this moment, reading his Bible—a copy of the New Testament that he has painfully copied out by hand into a notebook which he keeps carefully hidden from the guards. He leans across to Shukhov and says: "There you are, Ivan Denisovich, your soul is begging to pray. Why don't you give it its freedom." (153) This prompts a discussion about God and the nature of prayer that lasts for several pages. Shukhov resists his neighbor's evangelizing, observing, "Prayers are like those appeals of ours. Either they don't get through or they're returned with 'rejected' scrawled across 'em." (153) He goes on to describe the corruption of the Orthodox priest in his native village and complains,

> I'm not against God, understand that. I do believe in God. But I don't believe in paradise and hell. Why do you take us for fools and stuff us with your paradise and hell stories? That's what I don't like. (155)

By causing Shukhov to criticize traditional religious instruction, Solzhenitsyn was almost certainly doing some last minute fence-mending with the Soviet censors who would have to pass his work for publication. It would be a mistake to make too much of Shukhov's apparent skepticism, especially when we ourselves have seen him pray earlier in the book. Shukhov's "opposition" is also a rhetorical device that allows Alyosha the chance to explain the true nature of prayer:

> Ivan Denisovich, you shouldn't pray to get parcels or for extra stew, not for that. Things that man puts a high price on are vile in the eyes of Our Lord. We must pray about things of the spirit—that the Lord Jesus should remove the scum of anger from our hearts. . . (154)

And when Shukhov complains that "however much you pray it doesn't shorten your stretch," (155) Alyosha is "horrified" and responds:

> Oh, you mustn't pray for that either. . . Why do you want freedom? In freedom your last grain of faith will be choked with weeds. You should rejoice that you're in prison. Here you have time to think about your soul. (155)

Alyosha is no fool. He is almost certainly speaking for Solzhenitsyn who, in his Harvard speech, traced the moral decline of the West to our preoccupation with freedom and physical comfort. And Alyosha is unquestionably persuasive within the book itself: Just before the guards interrupt this conversation by ordering the men outside for a recount, Shukhov thinks: "Alyosha was speaking the truth. His voice and his eyes left no doubt that he was happy in prison." (156) It should also be noted that Solzhenitzyn has encouraged us to respect Alyosha throughout the book. He is not only "clean" and "tidy" (35)—in themselves remarkable achievements given the conditions under which the prisoners live—but he is also a hard worker. It is Alyosha who delivers mortar to Ivan Denisovich after most of the men have left off work, prompting Shukhov to reflect: "You could count on Alyosha. Did whatever was asked of him . . . If a man asks for help why not help him? Those Baptists had something there." (102-103)

Bearing these messages in mind, it seems almost incredible that there are American parents who want to censor the book because it contains a half dozen foul words—the sort of words that nearly everyone encounters long before reaching senior high school. There is a tremendous irony in this, for One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich is a book that should warm the cockles of a fundamentalist's heart. In addition to celebrating the importance of hard work and the life of the spirit, it even makes a point of frequently emphasizing the importance of good table manners. No matter how hungry or cold he is, Ivan Denisovich will never eat with his hat on, and he is a great believer in eating systematically: "food gulped down is no food at all." (36) These are words that any mother should love.

It might also be worth considering how much of prison life is not included in the book. There is much evidence to suggest that homosexuality, and homosexual rape, is as common in Soviet prison camps as it is in the average American penitentiary. And the coarse minded may be left wondering just what exactly was going on between those two Estonians who are, we are repeatedly told, inseparable. Solzhenitsyn, at least is not the sort of writer who would ever come out and tell us anything that could be decently overlooked. His goal was not so much the realistic portrayal of life in prison but the use of a sketch of such a life, touching only on surface details, as a vehicle for conveying his message about the nobility of spirit that can be attained even when in chains.

In short, I can imagine circumstances under which this book might be censored for political reasons, and I can even imagine circumstances in which instructors might feel uncomfortable teaching a work with such a strong Christian bias, since the discussion of religious values is often difficult in public schools. But for this profoundly moral work to be censored for containing "foul language" is to encourage the basest type of censor: The censor who condemns what he obviously has not read.

Works cited:

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Defense of One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Ken Kesey's novel of life in a hospital for the mentally ill, is a document of the sixties. Its anti-institutionalism, its celebration of boisterous rebellion against a seemingly rational (but actually unnecessarily repressive) establishment spoke to a generation of long-haired beaded and bearded anti-war activists. That the novel records something important to that era is not enough (perhaps) to justify its inclusion in a public school curriculum; we generally seek a universal and classic quality in the works we teach to students. One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest possesses this broader vision, however, and transcends its own timeliness by addressing a human problem that is both ever and omnipresent—that of the relationship between an individual and the social order. Kesey's novel raises crucial questions about power and control, about how groups establish and maintain the particular kind of order that they deem necessary to their survival. This book belongs in the high school curriculum for the following reasons:

a) It opens the issue of social control in the truest sense of that verb. The novel offers no simple answers to the question of what to do with those individuals whose behavior disrupts the social order. (It suggests in more certain terms what not to do and provides a solution for one individual—Chief Bromden, the narrator who is the one who flies over the cuckoo's nest, but the sad cases of voluntarily committed patients and the obvious functional incapacity of many of the Chronics suggest that there is no easy remedy.)

b) It treats a problem that is particularly relevant to teenage readers whose chafing under social constraints and whose ambivalence toward authority is often acute.

c) It is a readable book, dramatic, immediate, accessible to young readers.

d) It is a work of substantial literary merit that features an interesting narrative situation—Chief Bromden, the towering Indian who has posed as a deaf-mute in the ward for many years, narrates the novel, creating a complex and ironic perspective on events and personalities in the hospital.

Chief Bromden's narrative goes back in time (when prompted to do so by disturbing events on the ward) to recall his father's degradation at the hands of white government agents who coerced him into selling the tribal land. In shame his father descended into drunken oblivion while the young son lapsed into silence as a means of self-protection and as a reaction to the discovery that he was a voiceless nonentity anyway in the white community. When the novel opens, the Chief (a nickname) has been in the ward longer than any of the other patients and has spent most of that time pushing a broom from room to room. Like most of the others on the ward he has no sense of himself, and despite his six foot eight frame the Chief believes he has grown small and weak. He sees Big Nurse, the ward supervisor, as much larger than she is and capable of growing before his eyes when the need to exert control arises. Indeed, our narrator (whose reliability is itself a complex issue) hallucinates much of the time, believing firmly that Big Nurse and the forces she represents have the ward wired and rigged with a dizzying number of control devices—objective correlatives of the very effective kind of control exerted over the ward's residents by sheer power of suggestion and the medications that atrophy and deaden responses. (For instance, when the Chief believes that Big Nurse has activated the fog machine to flood the ward with a blinding fog, he is probably reacting to his latest dose of little red pills.)

The Chief functions as central reflector on the activities of the new resident, Randle Patrick McMurphy, who's been doing time at a work farm for rape and assault and who finagles his way onto the ward as an easy way of doing his time. Mac bursts intrusively upon the ward, bringing energy, lust, and levity into the drugged, robot-like lives of its inhabitants. He is instantly at odds with Nurse Ratched, or Big Nurse, a middle-aged tyrant who is proud of her controlled ward: "...I've watched her get more and more skillful over the years. Practice has steadied and strengthened her until now she wields a sure power that extends in all directions on hairlike wires. ..." (p. 26). McMurphy attempts to subvert all this control, urging the men on to defiance and self-assertion and setting them an example. His sustained power struggle (a true battle for the souls of the men) with Big Nurse is like an elaborate chess game between formidable opponents and is often very comic, as when Mac confronts Big Nurse at the door of the latrine wearing only a towel. He startles her by pulling off the towel, and she is relieved when he has shorts on underneath, only to discover that they are outrageous black shorts with large white whales leaping around on them:

> "And you, Mr. McMurphy," she says, smiling, sweet as sugar, "if you are finished showing off your manly physique and your gaudy underpants, I think you had better go back in the dorm and put on your greens.
>
> He tips his cap to her and to the patients ogling and poking fun at his white-whale shorts, and goes to the dorm without a word. (p. 97)

Big Nurse's controlled, parental response and McMurphy's feigned gallantry are part of the elaborate dance they do. The light tone of their struggle darkens as the novel moves on, however, and the narrator begins to feel afraid for McMurphy who realizes himself that his activities on behalf of the men on the ward may cost him dearly. Eventually—after a violent outburst in which Mac attacks Big Nurse in retaliation for her brutal treatment of the vulnerable Billy Bibbit—Mac is defeated via a frontal lobotomy, all other means of control having failed Big Nurse and her system. Acting out of love and gratitude, Chief Bromden, who believes that McMurphy is responsible for the restoration of his size and strength, smothers his diminished comrade and hurls a huge control panel (significantly) through a window to escape. The novel, thus, ends in both tragedy and triumph; McMurphy's momentous sacrifice has liberated the Chief, physically, verbally, emotionally.

Since it achieved popularity in the sixties, One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest has been subject to censorship in the public school system. In Greeley, Colorado in 1971, parents objected to three books with "obscene, filthy language" which appeared on a non-required reading list in a course on American culture. These three titles were I Never Promised You A Rose Garden, Love Story, and One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest.[2] In Strongsville, Ohio in 1974, five residents sued the Board of Education to keep two books—Kesey's novel and Manchild in the Promised Land—out of the classroom. Their suit alleged that both books "allow[ed] minors access to pornographic materials," and stated that the books "tend to glorify criminal activity, have a tendency to corrupt juveniles, and contain descriptions of bestiality, bizarre violence, and torture, dismemberment, death, and human elimination."[3] The Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom reports that the book was removed from public school libraries in both Alton, Oklahoma and Randolph, New York in 1975.[4] A drama teacher at a high school in Glen Burnie, Maryland was forbidden in 1980 to stage a version of the novel on the grounds that its use of sexual innuendo was objectionable.[5] In 1972 an English teacher from Bellevue, Washington felt compelled to defend the novel in an article in English Journal when she was attacked by parents for teaching an indecent, obscene, racist, immoral book.[6] All these charges are, from a superficial standpoint, understandable; the novel contains four-letter words in abundance and McMurphy expresses his sexuality blatantly, constantly, and in a sexist manner. Moreover, the four-letter words and the sexual language are uttered by characters with whom we sympathize and identify, often in reaction to characters with far more propriety whom we as readers loathe. The book, thus, seems to advocate or at least sanction such behavior. Further, it seems to encourage and support disruptive, anti-authoritarian behavior. The reader experiences exhilaration when McMurphy puts his fist through the nurses' station window to grab a forbidden pack of cigarettes; we applaud the weekend furlough fishing expedition in which the group, led by Mac, steals a fishing boat. Disregard for rules, property, and the rights of others on the part of protagonists/heroes may (somewhat understandably) not be what parents and teachers beset with disciplinary problems want their children reading about.

Those who don't find raw language, sexual remarks or mutinous behavior necessarily offensive in reading material for young people may still take issue with One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest for two other reasons: first it contains some disturbing material that some may find too mature for young readers. Kesey depicts electro-shock therapy and lobotomy graphically. Several patients who die in the text die gruesomely—Cheswick, Mac's first disciple, drowns in the therapeutic swimming pool when his fingers get stuck in the grate at the bottom; Billy Bibbit, the over-aged, under-developed stutterer, cuts his own throat when Big Nurse threatens to tell his overpowering mother of his sexual escapade with a prostitute, sneaked into the ward by McMurphy; the Irish hero himself is smothered, flailing in his bed, by the Chief:

> The big, hard body had a tough grip on life. It fought a long time against having it taken away, flailing and thrashing around so much I finally had to lie full length on top of it and scissor the kicking legs with mine while I mashed the pillow into the face. I lay there on top of the body for what seemed days. Until the thrashing stopped. Until it was still a while, and had shuddered once and was still again. Then I rolled off. I lifted the pillow, and in the moonlight I saw the expression hadn't changed from the blank, dead-end look the least bit, even under suffocation. I took my thumbs and pushed the lids down and held them till they stayed. Then I lay back on my bed. (p. 309)

Even though the novel ends on a positive note with the escape of the Chief, much of the matter in it is brutal.

The second 'liberal' objection to the novel as a high school text is to its stereotyped treatment of blacks and women. Big Nurse's hatchet men are three black orderlies who are despised and feared by patients, are referred to as boys, coons, and niggers at various points in the text, and who are lazy and sneaky. The Chief first presents the three to us in this way:

> They're out there. Black boys in white suits up before me to commit sex acts in the hall and get it mopped up before I can catch them. (p. 3)

The blacks are 'them,' the enemy or, at least, agents of the enemy Big Nurse. They are sneaky, perverted and sadistic, but they are also powerless, like the patients in the face of Big Nurse's powerful manipulative skills. She is herself, of course, a stereotyped castrating female of mythical proportions. Chief Bromden alludes regularly to her size and sees her grow larger at times. (This from a man who is 6'8", whom Mac calls the biggest Indian he's ever seen.) Big Nurse is also known as Mother Ratched by the male patients. The Chief describes McMurphy assessing her power in these terms:

> There's something strange about a place where the men won't let themselves loose and laugh, something strange about the way they all knuckle under to that smiling flour-faced old mother there with the too red lipstick and the too big boobs. (p. 46)

That 'something strange' is what McMurphy, newcomer on the ward, is so incredulous about—the fact that grown men tremble in the formidable woman's presence. She fuels the Chief's imagination in a variety of interesting ways; he, whose white mother tricked his Indian father into selling tribal land, whose father took the white mother's name upon their marriage, believes that a gust of cold follows Big Nurse as she walks through the ward, believes that, as she gets angry, "she blows up bigger and bigger, big as a tractor, so big I can smell the machinery inside the way you smell a motor pulling too big a load." (p. 5) Images of cold steel, machinery, wires, porcelain, hard glitter and whiteness are what he repeatedly associates with her. She is the focus of all of his fears, and the main reason the Chief grows to love and admire McMurphy is because the latter refuses to fear her.

The symbol of authority, then, in the novel is female—a large-breasted mother figure, "a bitch and a buzzard and a ball-cutter." (p. 58) The text suggests that strong women are evil and emasculating. The women viewed positively in the novel are the kind-hearted whores whom Mac introduces to the men and the sympathetic—and very tiny—Japanese nurse who works on the Disturbed Ward. There is nothing liberated nor original in the novel's mother/whore dichotomizing of women, except perhaps that Big Nurse's power extends to thoroughgoing domination of the doctors in the institution as well as the patients and orderlies—a situation probably atypical of most hospitals. There is no one in the novel to tower over or to contain her—except the macho McMurphy.

To a great extent readers must see Big Nurse as they see the blacks—through the eyes of Chief Bromden and the other patients. These characters are villains, malevolent oppressive forces, who don't ever get rounded out, humanized, or vindicated by the text. A teacher or parent who seeks to avoid reinforcing damaging stereotypes may understandably hesitate to recommend Kesey's novel to young readers.

I am less concerned here with rebuttal of all the objectives to the text I've cited above than I am with suggesting how the text can be profitably taught to secondary school students. Indeed, each of the objections listed above—to the book's foul language, its sexuality, its anti-authoritarianism, its particular forms of disturbing violence, its racism and sexism—can open stimulating and illuminating classroom discussions. In her 1972 defense of her own use of this book in her Bellevue, Washington high school English class, Janet R. Sutherland says that "to charge that the book is obscene, racist, or immoral because it gives a realistic picture of the world of the insane is to demonstrate lack of the minimum competency in understanding literature we expect of high school students."[7] We underestimate students badly if we judge them incapable of going beyond the surface of a text, and we underestimate our own pedagogical abilities if we don't believe that we can lead them beyond that surface.

In the first place, the book's raw language and preoccupation with a locker-room sort of sexuality must be seen in the context of the power struggle between institution and individual which is the core of the novel. Inasmuch as profanity exceeds the boundaries of acceptable social behavior, it becomes the language of the powerless, the expression of their anger. When the small, apoplectic Cheswick rants and curses the Big Nurse, having gained courage from McMurphy's example, he moves a step away from the servile, rabbit-like acquiescence of the others and acquires some dignity. Linguistically, the four-letter words, the slang, Mac's irreverent, hyperbolic, hillbilly dialect ("I been a bull goose catskinner for every gyppo logging operation in the Northwest and bull goose gambler all the way from Korea, was even bull goose pea weeder on the pea farm in Pendleton—so I figure if I'm bound to be a loony, then I'm bound to be a stompdown dadgum good one." (p. 19) are a response to the mechanistic jargon of Big Nurse with its constant references to control, calm, order, and propriety. Careful consideration of the different characters' linguistic idioms in this text is revealing and can, perhaps, lead to student insights into their own use of language (and that of others—parents, teachers) in contexts in which power, powerlessness, anger, and intimidation are determinant. Harding's formal academic speech (he precedes Mac as a leader—albeit a weak and cynical one—on the ward) which masks his pain and feelings of emasculation, Mac's street language, the doctor's abstractions, Big Nurse's language of control are all recorded, ironically, by the Chief who has had no spoken idiom for all the years he's posed as a deaf mute—who can barely articulate the words, the 'thank you' that he utters to McMurphy. Why people speak or fail to speak as they do and how this is related to who they are and how much power they have is a question that must be addressed when this book is taught.

Similarly the sexuality in the novel—probably the main reason for its presence on lists of frequently censored texts—needs to be seen as an affront to order, a breaking loose, a bringing to bear of the forces of chaos and disorder upon the anesthetizing regimentation on the ward. McMurphy, of course, introduces this new force to his drugged, asexual fellow patients. Billy Bibbit cannot speak to women without stuttering so Mac supplies a "whore" for his first sexual experience. Harding is afflicted with an attractive, promiscuous wife in whose presence he is impotent and cowed. The Big Chief has a voyeuristic and prudish fear of the black orderlies' sexuality and doubts his own manhood when he is tempted to touch the sleeping McMurphy. Into this den of repression explodes Mac and his incorrigible swagger: "My psychopathic tendencies? Is it my fightin' tendencies or my fuckin' tendencies? Must be the fuckin', mustn't it? All that wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am..." (p. 64) To the other ward residents, Mac is the symbol of male potency, the last hope against the larger-than-life repository of male fears of castration, Nurse Ratched. When he teases and goads the other patients about their sexuality ("Are you the renowned Billy Club Babbit? Of the famous fourteen inches?" (p. 99) he is trying to empower them in the only way he knows how. Important insights into the intimate relationship of power and sexuality can be gleaned from this novel. Issues such as rape as a political crime, the relationships between racism/sexism and sexual fear, and sexual stereotypes all receive rich, suggestive treatment in the novel, and discussion of these may help students learn much about the complexities of their own sexuality.

When the Strongsville, Ohio litigants claimed that One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest glorified criminal activity and tended to corrupt juveniles, they expressed deep-seated and universal fear of disruptive behavior, the breaking of rules, the exceeding of boundaries. Societies need rules and limits to survive and to thrive. When Mac attends his first group meeting on the ward, the doctor (at Big Nurse's behest) explains the theory of the Therapeutic Community to him—"how a guy has to learn to get along in a group before he'll be able to function in a normal society; how the group can help a guy by showing him where he's out of place; how society is what decides who's sane and who isn't, so you got to measure up." (p. 47) The ward is meant to be a microcosm of society. Student readers should discuss the novel's world as a mental ward in which various kinds of abuses and outrages take place and as a representative social institution which must exercise control and establish limits over its members. Trying to ascertain the points in the novel at which excessive or unnecessary control is exerted (as when Mac and company vote to watch the World Series and Big Nurse nullifies the vote) is a useful classroom activity. Speculation about the viewpoints of the hospital staff—their fear of losing control, the threat that McMurphy poses to them—can help to broaden a reader's perspective. By opening the issue of the individual vs. the institution, by examining it under different lights, a teacher can make clear that, far from advocating a scoff-law attitude, vandalism, or disruptive behavior, the book sheds light on the nature and causes of these breaches. Since, as educators we must be committed to the belief that seeing clearly results in acting wisely, the bringing to light of the complexities of individual/group conflict in Kesey's novel makes it a must read rather than a don't read.

What many young readers may tend to remember most sharply about this novel is Chief Bromden's heroic (and not very realistic) escape at the end. Having smothered his beloved McMurphy, the Chief is reminded by another patient in the dark of the night that Mac showed him how to escape his first week on the ward. What he's referring to is McMurphy's plan to throw a huge, heavy control panel through a barred window, something Mac himself attempts, to no avail. But since his friend and mentor has gradually convinced the Chief of the latter's own strength, the Chief finds himself able to do what Mac could not and succeeds. Just before the attempt, the Chief had grabbed the cap that his dead friend always wore and tried it on, only to find it too small. McMurphy has created a Frankenstein, has awakened a giant, has sacrificed himself for and transformed himself into this big Indian. The transformation of Mac's tragedy into the Chief's triumph helps to allay the disturbing, distressing aspects of the narrative. The novel is often brutal, but it is also often merry, and the good guys win, after a fashion. Nurse Ratched does destroy McMurphy, but many of the voluntary commitments sign themselves out or transfer to another ward after Billy Bibbit's suicide, and she is diminished in size. What McMurphy's personal sacrifice accomplished and how he succeeds in empowering the underclass he joins on the ward provides good discussion material and also a very positive reading of the text. The novel is disturbing, but it is far from hopeless.

Any teacher of the text must address the problem of racial and sexual stereotypes directly. At one point early in the novel Big Chief chronicles the history of black 'boys' who have come and gone as ward workers:

> The first one she gets five years after I been on the ward, a twisted sinewy dwarf the color of cold asphalt. His mother was raped in Georgia while his papa stood by tied to the hot iron stove with plowtraces, blood streaming into his shoes. The boy watched from a closet, five years old and squinting his eyes to peep out the crack between the door and the jamb, and he never grew an inch after. (p. 28)

The Chief has contempt for this black dwarf as he has for all of the orderlies, but his recounting of this tale opens up the kind of cause and effect analysis that careful readers will want to engage in. Big Nurse treats her black orderlies in a degrading, dehumanizing manner; they are subject to a series of constraints and turn their resentment downward to the residents in their power. The fact that their jobs are demeaning, low-level, probably low-paid, certainly dangerous and unlikely to lead anywhere needs to be brought to light. When Chief Bromden awakens one night (he is tied to his bed) to discover one of the orderlies scraping his carefully hoarded and rechewed gum from the underside of his bunk, we see the pathos of the orderlies' situation.

It is not, alas, so easy to account for and understand the castrating female stereotype that Big Nurse embodies. Here, it is crucial in teaching the novel to emphasize the limitations of the first person narrative. Big Nurse is far more a creation of the Chief's and other resident's imaginations than she is a representative reality. Deep archetypal male fear of a dominant mother figure finds expression in her narrative treatment. The Chief's own experience with his white mother must be kept in mind as we read his descriptions of Mother Ratched. The reader must step back from the limited narrative perspective to see that the Chief's unreliability lies in his distorted sense of this woman—a distortion in which all the residents participate to some extent, underscoring the ease with which the oppressed see their oppressors in stereotypical terms (just as oppressors have a narrow sense of those whom they oppress). Big Chief's narrative is reliable to the extent that it is a true rendering of his own experience, perceived, most often, metophorically. The wires, gadgets, buttons, fog machine that he sees the Big Nurse manipulating are metaphors for the psychic skills she's developed and for the power invested in her institutionally. Young readers will feel the power of his perspective but will need to be instructed in its limitations. This is a particularly male narrative; when it stereotypes women, it does so in a way that is both understandable and tragic and that alludes indirectly to Freudian theories of the relationship between psychosis and men's and women's fear of one another. Big Nurse must be seen as more than the warped, frosty ex-Army nurse who reigns in the ward—she is a powerful fiction, the sum of all male fear of and anger toward women. When Mac finally attacks her physically, he rips her white uniform from her large breasts and goes for her throat, a direct, very violent, and highly sexual kind of assault. She retaliates, institutionally, by ordering the lobotomy (the most drastic form of castration) that finally brings him to the ground. The terrible sexual battleground on which these two wage war must be placed in a larger perspective than that which the Chief offers—no one wins here. From a literary standpoint, though, students can profit from going beyond the narrative perspective, from distinguishing between its truth and its limitations, from realizing that an author, a text (in its sociocultural context), and a narrative can have separate, while overlapping, meanings.

Finally, the novel compensates for its use of some stereotypes by undermining others. When Randle McMurphy enters the ward of Acutes and Chronics, he makes everyone uncomfortable by focusing on the individuals present. As the Chief becomes increasingly appreciative of Mac, he begins recalling details, remembered, observed, overheard, about each patient. The slobbering lunatics are humanized, distinguished, and rounded out through the combined force of Mac's catalystic presence and the Chief's increasingly coherent narrative articulation. Big Chief himself sports many stereotypical characteristics of an Indian—his silence, his acquiescent victimization, his tactic of sneaking off and hiding when faced with the ordeal of being shaved by the blacks. Silent, passive stealth gives way to both direct speech and action under McMurphy's influence. We see both the reasons behind the stereotype (in his flashbacks) and his gradual triumphant transcendence of it.

We also see a form of male bonding and tenderness that transcends the locker-room sex talk, the poker games, the fishing trip that Mac organizes. The group develops a solidarity, sensitivity, and protectiveness that permits McMurphy to subside for a while as their leader when he begins to realize the price he will pay personally for assuming that role. When he does pay the ultimate price—his lobotomy—for having again resumed leadership in avenging the death of Billy Bibbit, the love which prompts Chief to murder him is much like that which moves George to shoot Lenny in Of Mice and Men. After Big Chief breaks his silence and he and Mac have their first conversation from their neighboring bunks, the Indian experiences a strong urge to touch McMurphy. He fears his own motives at first, then realizes that he just wants to touch him because of who he is. McMurphy's gift to him includes more than just the power to speak and to act—it includes the power to love.

One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest is a rich book from both a literary and a sociocultural standpoint. It stimulates thought on important and large issues. It fosters an open, questioning approach to those issues. It demonstrates the power of both first person narrative and metaphor as a means of understanding one's own experience. At the same time, it suggests the limitations of those devices, encouraging a complex perspective in which the reader moves back and forth from involvement with to detachment from the narrator. It should be taught in the classroom.

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[1] Ken Kesey, One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest, (1962; rpt. New York: Penquin, 1976). All subsequent page references in parenthesis are from this edition.

[2] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom, Vol. XX, No. 3 (May 20, 1971), p. 59.

[3] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom, Vol. XXIII, No. 5 (November, 1974), p. 152.

[4] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom, Vol. XXIV, No. 2 (May, 1975), p. 41 and Vol. XXIV, No. 4 (July, 1975), p. 108.

[5] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom, Vol. XXIX, No. 3, (May, 1980), p. 52.

[6] Janet R. Sutherland, "A Defense of Ken Kesey's One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest, English Journal, Vol 61, No. 1 (January, 1972) pp. 28-31.

[7] Ibid., p. 30.

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Threshold Literature
A Discussion of Ordinary People

Booger—a word which T.V.'s urbane Tony Randall once characterized as the worst in the language, including slang, vulgarities and obscenities. And one that my wife finds so objectionable that were she a member of any book selection or evaluation committee, she would blackball all works containing it, no matter what socially redeeming value they might have. Paradoxically, she sees no latent harm in the word, nor does she consider its use or users immoral. Yet she would eagerly applaud any mandate that would render our alphabet incapable of ever again lining its letters up to form that word.

Ordinary People has a few sparks of vernacular obscenity to create atmosphere and intensity, but it does not employ "booger." If it did, people of my wife's persuasion would probably try to nail it and ally themselves with any compatriot protestors to petition for its removal. However, no book has ever been banned because of that "booger," and no author has ever had an editor pluck it out. Yet I wonder how much opposition to certain works of literature has a similar booger-hunting whimsy under it, concealed behind an intricate tapestry of righteousness or moralizing.

Still, no matter what the motivation, people have a right to do their best to help create what they consider to be a wholesome educational ambience. Nor are books and schools singled out for scrutiny by this concern for what goes on in the ecology of a community. When parents or school boards apply pressure to put material outside student access, they exercise the same type of environmental determination that leads people to keep bars and X-level adult bookstores out of residential areas. Such efforts reflect a scenario which hopes to have a gardening effect and to implement their goals, most communities establish codes of decorum, some of which carry legal clout: prohibitions against such things as open air nudity, public urination, and obscenity.

Oddly enough, people usually do not regard these matters as categorically immoral in themselves; they only wish to control the context in which they occur. The same person who inveighs against flashers may fondly recall some youthful skinny-dipping, and even the most strait-laced of hunters has been known to forego a return trip to a service station in order to heed a call of nature.

Keeping certain books out of school libraries and classrooms is first cousin to these decorum efforts. It simply shows that parents wish to exercise discretion regarding two things: 1) the conditions under which children experience sensitive matters; 2) the nature of the experiences themselves. I doubt that anyone opposed to Ordinary People would say that the book should have been suppressed through censorship—they only want to determine the conditions under which it enters their community or schools. If such an attitude exists, whether or not a book is to be in the school library or classroom may then become a matter of negotiation, not of fiat from governmental agencies, book-banners, or the open door policy of Hustler magazine.

Censorship itself is one of those red-flag words that gets all sorts of hormonal activity going. Spectres of Gulags loom in the mind; the spirits of Milton and Tom Paine are invoked. Unfortunately, discretionary banning and censorship are often used to describe the same action, even though they differ markedly. Censorship prevents material from entering the public domain; book-banning regulates consumption once it has entered. Censorship prohibits choice: discretionary banning allows the full range of choice from writer to consumer. If the process and attitude described above surround whether a book is to be involved in education, censorship, as such, is not involved.

A citizen or organization has the right to expression, but the market has no responsibility to publish that material. Nor are consumers constitutionally compelled to purchase, read it, or acquire it for their schools once it has been published. As individuals, we decide for ourselves; as parents and community members, we exercise similar choices for our children and students. We avidly guard that ability to choose; although we may on our own petition to have a book taken from the shelves, we would resent any governmental or legislative agency usurping that prerogative.

So when a book like Ordinary People creates a fuss, we need to make a case for it, to show that it will enrich its readers and enhance the educational environment instead of detracting from it. Can such a case be made? Of course, and a strong one. Once made, will it prevail? Well—it might or it might not. One would like to assume that the right to discretionary banning carries with it the responsibiltiy to make judgments based on a reasonably thorough consideration of a book's merits, not simply whimsy or bias. However, no one seems to relish being reminded of responsibilities, although humanists do what they can to restore that equilibrium between right and responsibility. The efforts may be fruitless, but we might remember the story of a sage who saved a scorpion from drowning in a stream. The scorpion instinctively stung the hand that had helped it and scurried back into the stream. The sage saved him again and again, and was stung each time for his efforts. A passerby, his curiosity piqued, asked the sage why he persisted in saving the scorpion. Didn't he realize the insect would keep stinging him? Replied the sage, "The scorpion stings because it is his nature." "But then why do you help him?" asked the observer. "I help him because that is my nature," answered the sage.

First, instead of praising this book, let's look at the worst in it. Let's lean on it hard and inventory its controversial points in a ruthlessly biased summary.

Ordinary People, Judith Guest. The trauma as a suicidal teenager struggles for normalcy, while his parents move toward divorce. Uses obscene language, sexual scenes, nudity and violence. Includes grim representations of adolescent depression, suicide and psychosis. Contains unresolved pessimism and disillusionment.

Obviously this book would serve no purpose in the primary classrooms. But where do we go from here? What would particular groups object to? A short taxonomy of objectors may outline the problems the book presents. The five groups here identified do not encompass all objections. They represent the most salient:

Fetishists
Monkey Sees
Ostriches
Dominoes
Catchers-of-the-Raw

The first three groups tend to be the most whimsical and adamant: they need to be outvoted. The last two groups are receptive to argument and will enter into dialog. But the substantial rationale behind their convictions makes them formidable discussants.

First of all, the Fetishists, the "booger-hunters." They will object categorically to one thing or another and let that objection harpoon the whole book. They will not compromise; all they need to know is that the word, situation, action, or relationship occurs, and the book is out—unless the objectionable parts are excised. From a censorship perspective, they're easily pleased: omit this word or that scene, bowlderize the script, and all is well.

Ordinary People, it must be admitted, does provide grist for the fetishists. It does use a few four-letter words. Although it lacks the blase tour-de-force a la Henry Miller, it does not have the antiseptic diction of a Tom Swift novel. Nor would it suffer greatly if the objectionable language were removed. The question is, why do so? What harm could be done? The language would be titillating only to a grade school child delighted to see the forbidden words in print. Older readers would respond to the language in terms of its intention; to highlight the emotional state of the person using them. A similar rationale could be made for the scenes, but fetishists don't respond to rationales, so the effort is purely for the eavesdropping allies on both sides, the principle involved, and to evoke a sense of righteousness that humanists delight in as much as Fetishists.

Next, the Monkey Sees. These assume that children will imitate selectively what they read and invariably model undesirable over virtuous behavior. There may be a germ of truth here. Huck Finn's penchant for corncob pipes inspired my own experience with smoking. But Ordinary People offers very little to imitate. Suicide? 24-hour-a-day depression? Guest presents these with no glamor, no allure, no factor of temptation. The harshness with which she presents her study argues for the book as a warning against the moods it explores.

The Ostriches. An endangered species who exclude certain moods and themes from any kind of consideration. These might well react to the depression and stress throughout the book by wishing their portrayal to disappear. This helps them ignore what they do not want to admit exists. They haven't experienced similar situations, nor do they see any point in contemplating them. To their extent of receptivity, this group can be answered in the same way as the next.

In these next two groups, the nature of the objections shifts. The arguments are more articulated and broader in perspective. The logic is often sound, but the assumptions create the controversy.

The Dominoes. They will admit all the merits of the book, they have no objection to it, and may even agree that it should be in the library or school. However, they fear the precedent the presence of the book will establish. They assume, and with some cause, that when a door opens for one, it's difficult to close it for others. The difficulty in responding to this is that a historical continuum exists from Ulysses to Hustler, from Lolita to child pornography. Here is where the negotiation and discussion play their strongest role. Apologists for a given book should make clear that acceptance of one book does not guarantee admission of another. A separate rationale must be put forward on the merits of each document; we need to be ready with an apologia when the need arises.

Last of all, the Catchers-of-the-Raw, or Holden Caufields. These people understand and acknowledge the reality of the sensitive material portrayed in a given work but wish to guard their children from such matters as depressing experiences and sordid reality. It's a losing battle, of course, but theirs is a delaying action, not a decisive one. Yet given the inevitability of actual encounters with the sharp edges of experience, a work like Ordinary People can serve as a buffer that informs and actually protects—a quality of threshold literature, which prepares the sensibility through imagination for what it will soon encounter in experience.

And granted that the book does deal with depression and the more visceral moments in life, it redeems itself from being a depressing book in several ways. It makes severe depression less intimidating by examining it and revealing it as a normal reaction to abnormally stressful situations. There is even a triumph over depression, an affirmation of the reservoir of human strength. During an unexpected acceleration of his despondency, Conrad makes contact with this sense of affirmation after his analyst clarifies emotional impotence with this observation.

Geez, if I could get through to you, kiddo, that depression is not sobbing and crying and giving vent, it is plain

> and simple reduction of feeling. Reduction, see? Of all feeling. People who keep stiff upper lips find that it's damn hard to smile.[1]

Simple, straightforward advice—enough to turn the tide in Conrad's favor.

In this book people survive, endure, and mature—despite the death of the elder son, the attempted suicide of Conrad, the atrophy of Calvin and Beth's marriage. Its theme conveys the positive implication that we can survive problems, even though we may not be able to solve them. There is even a qualified "happy" ending in this endurance, an ending which ironically constitutes the major fault of the novel in that the depression gets resolved too easily. The guilt that has prompted Conrad's suicide attempt and plagued him through the novel gets neutralized in that fairly easy scene with the analyst. The answer is a bit too pat, and although the alchemical transformation of Conrad's attitude doesn't quite approach Dumbo's realization that he can fly without the feather, it's from the same school of thought—one the "catchers" always commend.

It's always gratifying to respond to objectors such as those above. There is the sense of battle for a virtuous cause against a dangerous and substantial opposition. But one cannot rely on the defensive strategy of an apologia to make the best case: better to affirm the strong points first. And Ordinary People has plenty, but one stands out as particularly relevant.

Some works function as thresholds. They can lead a reader into an awareness and understanding of wider dimension of the human spirit, either by expressing a situation shared by the reader, or by allowing insight into the kaleidoscopic variations of the human condition. There has been little threshold literature for young adults, even though the increasing stress and diversity of living almost demands it. We can see documentaries on such problems as teenage alcoholism and pregnancy and gain only surface knowledge of the problem. Where technology provides us with a window to the externals of the world, art must keep pace by its investigation of the inner domain. Books such as the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew novels illustrate what threshold literature is not—adventures of young adults, yet with no significant attention to how sensibilities change or mature with experience. Such stories could easily feature talking horses or bipedal Great Danes; cartoons can easily be made of them.

On the other hand, books such as those contributed by Judy Blume address the inner world, the world of emotions instead of events. Her work illustrates what threshold literature can do: create a controlled situation where the readers can encounter in fiction what they may soon experience in real situations, either as observers or participants.

Ordinary People also belongs in this category. It divides its focus between the subjective experiences of the son, Conrad, and the father, Calvin, and initiates the reader into the complementary perspectives of adolescence and maturity. Both perspectives give insight into the deserts that open up between people when they most need contact.

Teachers could well focus on Conrad as an entry-level persona. Although we would hope no reader shares his particular situation, his emotions are typical ones with which a reader could easily identify, and the motifs of his encounters are those that begin intruding into the hyperboraean climate of most adolescent minds. We see the drawbacks to emotional independence—how it can lead to isolation and separation from the very forces that can heal its injuries. We also see how his awakened sense of history grows from guilt over the past to confidence in the future. The problems and tangles of evolving maturity receive insightful attention here, as do several others quite recognizable to the teenage reader: peer-pressure, school harassment, the struggle with emotions that emerge with ferocious intensity.

Although Conrad's material may be initially appealing to younger readers, Calvin's perspective may prove most enlightening. It allows them to experience the vulnerability of the adult mind, to enter a world they usually know only through a taciturn exterior. The veil of parental inaccessibility is lifted, and they can observe a correlation between the frustration and anxiety they experience and that which occurs in matured minds. While Conrad has his nest of hooks to sort out, Calvin has a similar batch. Their emotional odysseys follow roughly parallel courses. Conrad is involved with sports; Cal has his career.

Both feel the powerful influence of the past on present events.

Conrad must come to terms with the death of his brother; Calvin must deal with the breakup of his marriage. Calvin shows the adult mind charted: the relationship with a youth that Conrad has yet to encounter, the constant worry about family and career, the tragic sense of restriction in reaching out toward loved ones. The portrayal of these complementary sensibilities could well yield compassion for the younger, sympathy for the older.

The book abounds with similar entrances, and several general themes come to mind: that ordinary people often find themselves in unusually taxing situations which distort and amplify their emotions; that people in such struggles must not be seen as deviant types but representative types reacting to abnormal situations; that there is a certain haphazard nature in the universe of the human spirit, matters beyond the pat rational assumptions of post-Freudian analysis.

This all may be quite commendable stuff, but what about the questionable material exposed in the synopsis? At the risk of making an apologia for the book too simple, let me say that books of a certain style contain a built-in safety factor: they turn away any reader not mature enough to handle them. Ordinary People has this quality. There is nothing in it to gratify the thrill seeker. For one thing, the heavy emphasis on introspection and interior monolog generates a fairly static physical environment in order to highlight emotional dialectics. Conversation and reflection slow things down more. Most of the attention falls on the "housekeeping" aspects of life: the stress of school on Conrad, the complications of a career for Calvin.

And all of the episodes of sex and violence referred to in my synopsis are presented in a fairly discursive style, with little graphic focus. In fact, for a sexual scene between Calvin and Beth, the author ushers in language so oblique it could double as vocabulary suitable to describe a checkers match. And when Conrad and Jeannine have an intimate scene (very near the end of the book), the dialog receives the emphasis. The entire scene serves to confirm the emerging optimism in Conrad and to strengthen him even after the news of a friend's suicide. So, if someone is looking for a book to appeal to or encourage prurient interest, Ordinary People holds only disappointment.

Each questionable scene has a similar explanation, and there are few such scenes, at that. In fact, if we cut out all the particular passages dealing with "sensitive" areas, they would lay out to a little over one of the books 263 pages. So yes, the situations are there, but this book derives from a different genus than The Valley of the Dolls.

However, this statistical approach is not quite fair to those who would object to elements of theme and mood. The book does explore some raw wounds in the human psyche, and some people may object to such a focus in reading material even for a secondary school audience. But objections of this sort often do a great injustice to the potential literature offers. The unacknowledged premise in such a criticism is that literature functions essentially as entertainment or escapism—emotionally safe stuff that can aid reading skills. This ignores literature's potential to create a threshold by which the reader can enter a wider expanse of the human topography and develop a more matured perspective through that vision.

Threshold books reveal one of good literature's finest characteristics. Some such books even attain the status of "classic." But strangely enough, their very utility as tools of insight subjects them to attack, such as has happened with Huckleberry Finn and The Scarlet Letter. On the other hand, some books are never challenged: those that are infused with an irrelevance to a reader's personal situation and relationships. Many of the popular "classics" provide examples of this. They employ baroque, superbowl passions that engage us as awestruck observers, not emotionally involved participants. They're safe. Parents don't get into bitter debate with their children over the issues in Crime and Punishment or Moby Dick. Nor can anyone acquire credible insight into children's ingratitude from King Lear. We can appreciate occasional doses of inflated sentiments, however, because such experiences transport us away from the bothersome concerns of our lives. But we also need art that enters us as we are, that presents us with parameters of feeling we might actually have, with situations that we see as possible around us. As "ordinary people" we need words that can reveal insight into how we are, and where we are. Ordinary People assays out to that; it lacks the lofty level of intellectual melodrama possessed by the "safe" book, classic or otherwise, and that's the quality that justifies making it accessible to any heart it speaks to.

[1] Judith Guest, Ordinary People (New York: Viking, 1976), p. 225.

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In Defense of Our Bodies, Ourselves

Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book by and for Women is a health book, but not a health book like you studied in seventh grade, nor in high school biology class, nor even in college. It differs in that it gives as much attention to mental and emotional health as to physical health. It's heavy on sex-related issues, and it puts the responsibility for one's health on the individual instead of the medical profession. The assumption is that women can become so knowledgeable about health issues that they will be able to talk to their all-knowing "gods" who rule a vast and mysterious kingdom of hospitals, clinics, and labs.

Defending such a book is different from defending a piece of fiction. Its history as well as its future must be taken into account. The book, written by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, disproves the notion that a committee can't possibly write a good book. On the opening pages one hundred individuals and four institutions are thanked for providing information, advice, and support, and on the authorship list nearly fifty individuals are listed as writers.

The Boston Women's Health Book Collective had its beginning at a local women's conference held in the spring of 1969. Members of a discussion session on "women and their bodies" decided to keep meeting. They were brought together by their common frustration with the medical profession. At first they called themselves "The Doctor's Group." Then, as they decided to explore the various things they wanted to know about and to share their new-found information with each other, as well as with newcomers, their discussion meetings turned into a course first called "Women and Their Bodies," then did research on different subjects and wrote papers which were mimeographed as course-discussion material.

In 1971 the papers were printed and bound in an inexpensive edition by the New England Free Press. Reprinting followed reprinting and it soon became obvious that there was a national market for the book. Simon and Schuster published a 276-page edition in 1973, and then a 383-page expanded and revised version in 1976. Extra attention was focused on this edition when the American Library Association Young Adult Services Division chose to put it on their 1976 list of outstanding books for young adults. A related book, Ourselves and Our Children: A Book by and for Parents authored by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, was published in 1978 by Random House. In 1980 Random House also published Changing Bodies, Changing Lives: A Book for Teens on Sex and Relations by "Ruth Bell and other co-authors of Our Bodies, Ourselves and Ourselves and Our Children together with members of the Teen-book Project." Talking with your Teenager: A Book for Parents by Ruth Bell and Leni Zeiger Wildflower published by Random House in 1983 was also tied in with Our Bodies, Ourselves. None of these books was meant as a sequel or a replacement for the first book. (Note that they were published by different companies.) However, the authors and publishers apparently wished to capitalize on the reputation of the earlier book or they would not have acknowledged the authors' previous writing experiences in bold face print on the covers.

In January of 1985, Simon and Schuster is publishing a third edition of Our Bodies, Ourselves. In a telephone interview (August 27, 1984) with Ann Godoff, the Simon and Schuster editor, I asked if she expected the new edition to be equally controversial. "I certainly hope so," she responded and then quickly added that the company knew from the very beginning that it would be a controversial book, but that they are, nevertheless, very proud of it. "It is unprecedented as a self-help book." Two-and-a-half million copies have been sold. It is impossible to know whether, or to what degree, the notoriety of the book contributed or detracted from the sales. Certainly, the controversy brought it to people's attention. Ms. Godoff noted that, as we were talking, almost fifteen years after publication, the book with related news clippings and correspondence was the featured attraction at a Newark library display calling attention to Banned Books Week.

I asked Ms. Godoff about changes from the first to the second edition. For example, in the second edition an apologetic footnote was added to the chapter on abortion:

> Because this is a chapter on abortion, it inevitably seems that we are advocating abortion as the "right" or the "best" or "most liberated" thing to do. We do not believe that everyone with an unplanned pregnancy "should" have an abortion. We give so much space to abortion information here because it has been so unavailable in the past and because it is an issue that so many are confronted with. (p. 216)[1]

And early in the first book a woman is shown doing carpentry work, apparently remodeling a bathroom. The toilet looks dirty and there is no seat on it. In the second edition the photo has been cropped so the toilet doesn't show.

I asked editor Godoff if such changes had been made in hopes of appeasing the censors. She responded in the negative, explaining, however, that she and the authors had made a conscious effort to keep readers from different socio-economic levels and different ethnic groups from feeling excluded.

Photographs are especially revealing of such matters. They go a long way toward establishing tone. I wish that someone could figure out a kind of research that would tell us how much of the negative reaction to Our Bodies, Ourselves came because of the factual information that was presented, how much because of underlying feminist philosophies, and how much because of a negative "gut" reaction to the photographs—sort of an I-don't-want-these-people-to-be-role-models-for-my-children reaction— and how much because the book is a "downer." The "downer" aspect of the book relates to the way it strips away some of our favorite security blankets. In American culture medical doctors hold a place of respect that borders on worship. Our Bodies, Ourselves questions this reverence and makes a strong case for the necessity of people taking responsibility for their own physical and mental well-being. Another security blanket that the book yanks away is the idea that for each of us a knight in shining armor will appear out of nowhere, sweep us off our feet, and then walk with us into the sunset where we will live happily ever after. That's such a pleasant dream that it's painful to relinquish.

Another "downer" is the way Our Body, Ourselves reminds us that there are a lot of scary things out there. Within the last few months at my university someone has installed at eye level on the inside of the door of each cubicle in the women's bathrooms an 8½" x 11" placard which gives a miniature lesson on how to examine one's breasts for cancer—"the leading cause of death in American women." This information is accurate and valuable and it may save my life. Nevertheless I resent being reminded at least three times a day of how vulnerable I am. As I sit down and begin to read over the chart—I can't avoid it unless I close my eyes—I feel as if I belong to some "primitive" tribe whose members must offer daily prayers for protection to their gods. The only difference is that in our efficient, mass-media society where time is at a premium, I read my prayer from a printed card while I go to the bathroom, and the god I pray to is the great god of science and technology.

The feeling of malaise that this gives me is similar, I think, to the feeling that people get when they read Our Bodies, Ourselves. And the new topics being added, which will increase the 1985 edition to 650 pages, include growing old, non-medical approaches to health care, addiction to alcohol and drugs, violence toward women, environmental health issues, body image and reproductive technology. Except for the information on reproductive technology and perhaps the non-medical approaches to health care, these topics do not exactly qualify as good news and will therefore do little to endear the book to people who have an if-you-don't-like-the-message-kill-the-messenger reaction.

Now as to my advice for people who want to have this book in their libraries or use it in classes with students, I offer the following very personal and admittedly biased thoughts.

1. Do not force the book on anyone. Have it available along with several other books that treat similar topics, but respect the wishes of those parents who do not want their children reading or looking at this book.

   Remember that it is a book written by and for grown women. The authors' ages ranged from twenty-five to forty-one. They were writing to their contemporaries and so parts of the book treat topics far removed from many teenager's experiences. I have a new empathy for parents ever since one of my neighbors—a gun buff—decided to take my two teenage sons out to the desert and teach them marksmanship. I didn't like what I considered interference in the raising of my boys. I felt an implied criticism of my own absent-minded-professor-type husband, who in my neighbor's eyes, was not helping his boys develop their "masculinity." I also resented this neighbor offering himself as a role model to my boys. I didn't want them to aspire to drive a pick-up truck with a gun rack in the back window.

   The next summer this neighbor's eight-year-old son used one of his father's guns to shoot his twelve-year-old brother in the stomach. The injured brother lived but will have to have a kidney transplant before he is twenty. In the midst of this tragedy, what came forcefully home to me was the realization that my neighbor never changed his mind about the wisdom of having guns in his home. He simply regretted that he hadn't taught his children carefully enough. It occurred to me how similar the situation would be if one of my children were to have a sex-related misfortune. I wouldn't think it was because I had taught my children about sex or because I had such books as Our Bodies, Ourselves; Changing Bodies, Changing Lives; What's Happening to Me; The Joy of Sex; and Growing into Love on the family bookshelves. Like my neighbor I would simply regret that I hadn't taught my children carefully enough.

2. Help people realize that no one book can be all things to all people. The women who put this book together made more of an effort than do most authors to include diverse opinions, but such an effort goes unappreciated by readers who skim the book looking only for opinions or ideas with which they either strongly agree or disagree. On page two of the preface is one of the most important statements in the book:

   > Many women have spoken for themselves in this book, though we in the collective do not agree with all that has been written. Some of us are even uncomfortable with part of the material. We have included it anyway, because we give more weight to accepting that we differ than to our uneasiness.

   Bring this statement to the attention of readers and be ready to discuss its implications.

3. Help people realize the complexity of the issues that are being discussed. Whether we are looking at the Greek myths, Shakespeare's plays, the Holy Bible, the writings of Sigmund Freud, Robert Havighurst's developmental tasks of the adolescent, Gail Sheehy's Passages, or the dozens of tabloid newspapers that line the racks of grocery store check-out stands, the conclusion to be drawn is that human sexuality is exceedingly complicated. The matter is so individualistic that in trying to restate Havighurst's adolescent developmental task of "achieving a ______ relationship with the opposite sex," I can't remember what word should go in the blank. Is it proper,

comfortable, beneficial, exhilarating, or satisfactory? I think the latter is what Havighurst used, but then the question must be asked, satisfactory to whom? To the individual? To the individual's partner or partners? To the family? To society? Also, today many people are outspoken enough to question the latter half of the statement. Does the relationship have to be with the "opposite" sex? And is it accurate to think about sexuality only in terms of a "relationship"? A further complication is that the authors of Our Bodies, Ourselves do not treat sexual activities and attitudes in isolation. They show how, in a broad sense, such things are tied in with political as well as religious ideologies.

4. At the same time that you recognize the value of the information in Our Bodies, Ourselves and that you ensure its availability to those who want to read it, listen sympathetically to parents and others who protest the book. Such protests are in many cases emotional releases for heartfelt frustration.

Sexuality is an area where most of us feel uneasy. As advertisers, popular writers, our best friends, and television and radio talk-show hosts know, there are few of us who don't at least occasionally wonder if our sex lives are all that they could or should be. The doubts and uneasiness that we feel for ourselves, we feel much more strongly for our children. We worry because they are physically mature and yet have had so little time to accumulate the intellectual and emotional experience that we hope can protect them from making harmful sex-related decisions. We also worry because traditional restraints and patterns of behavior are being questioned so that today's young adults have no clear-cut models to follow. Marketing techniques, television, movies, books, magazines, newspapers, and radio keep the matter of sex in the public eye.

This constant display of sexual material forces people to consider and take stands on such controversial issues as homosexuality, masturbation, premarital sex, violence in relation to sex, the effects of pornography, the role of sex in love and family relationships, child abuse, and "open" marriages. The makers of sexy advertisements, movies, song lyrics, etc. cannot be blamed for creating an interest in sex. Instead, there is a circular effect. The messages grow out of people's natural interest in sex, but in turn they also feed this interest. It would be naive, indeed, for us to say that our grandparents knew nothing of the sex-related controversies listed above. However, it was certainly easier for those of our ancestors who chose not to think about such matters to remain in a state of relative innocence.

I am convinced that what many of the people who want to censor sex education books are doing is simply filing a protest against the overwhelming bombardment of sexual material which all of us meet in our daily lives. The sex education book in the school or public library is the closest thing at hand. It is the only part of the matter which parents have hopes of controlling. Looked at in this way, we can see that when a parent demands that a book be taken from library shelves the action is more emotional than intellectual. It's taking a stand, a kind of twist on the old hymn "Brighten the corner where you are." In response, we need to empathize with the parents' feelings and their desire to "do something." But at the same time we also need to remember our professional obligation to protect people's access to information and ideas. New ways of looking at old ideas have always frightened people. As educators our job is to listen to those who are frightened or angered and to conduct discussions in such a way that people with opposing opinions are brought closer together rather than driven further apart.

This is the challenge we face. I hope we're up to it.

Quotations taken from The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book by and for Women. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976, Second Edition.)

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Penance and Repentance in The Scarlet Letter

It comes as a surprise to many Hawthorne scholars that The Scarlet Letter is a work often attacked and banned at the secondary level. That this work which has been more responsible for acquiring Hawthorne's fame than any other of his works should be under attack by censors indicates how serious the problem of censorship is in our secondary and elementary schools. It is a problem that teachers must seriously address if we are to truly educate our students. The Scarlet Letter, I feel, has been attacked as an immoral book that mocks religion, glorifies adultery, dabbles in the occult and generally negatively influences young readers because, as is often the case in attacks upon great and complex pieces of literature, the attackers misread the work.

While Hawthorne does examine organized religion, the possibility of satanic influences in the world, the complexities of adultery and the cancerous effects of hypocrisy upon an individual, he does so in a mature and fair-minded manner. He is not, as is often thought and taught, the creator of a shallow one-sided attack upon Puritanism and a defender of the rebellious Hester Prynne. What he is, is an artist. And as an artist he shows life, its problems and temptations, and most of all its people, in all its complexities and ambiguities. Hawthorne is, after all, a master of ambiguity. In "The Custom House" Hawthorne describes Hester Prynne for the first time as a woman who "gained from many people the reverence due to an angel, but, I should imagine, was looked upon by others as an intruder and a nuisance." (Letter 32) This insistence upon seeing both sides of a person's character is inherent in Hawthorne's novel. It is, in fact, that which makes the work a success. The work survives because it does not preach, because it does not provide an easy answer to the thorny moral problems we all encounter in our life.

The more often one reads The Scarlet Letter, the more one sees the multiplicity of meanings in the actions of the characters, the setting, and the symbols used by Hawthorne to develop the tale. The first chapter amply illustrates the richness of Hawthorne's art. In setting up the story through a description of the prison, he notes with irony that all founders of "whatever Utopia" must create cemeteries and prisons. To the Puritan, of course, this was a necessity based on man's sinful nature, his imperfect and imperfectible nature. This view of human nature also necessitated the creation of laws and beadles to enforce those laws. To the romantic, however, law was a restriction of man's freedom; it restricted his right to achieve personal happiness. Society and its laws were the source of evil, whereas man was naturally good. Hawthorne, of course, had direct experience with the pantisocratic thinking of his generation during his "wild, free days on the Assobeth." (Letter 25) He also had spent time with the "dreary brethren of Brook Farm," (25) and "talking with Thoreau about pine-trees and Indian relics." (25) Nature, for Hawthorne, included both roses in June and ugly weeds such as "burdock, pig-weed and apple-peru." (48) The forest, in its natural and untamed state, could be both a refuge from the laws of civilization (freedom to the romantic), or it could be viewed as a naturally evil place (by the Puritans), a place where old, mistress Hibbins meets the Black Man. This conflict of interpretation is at the heart of not only the novel but also at the heart of life itself. Is Hester a sinner, or is she a saintly woman following the path of Anne Hutchinson? The reader must decide; there is room for both views because Hester is a mixture of both. When she emerges from the prison, she exhibits both a "burning blush" and a "haughty smile." (52) Her elaborately embroidered "A" had "the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity and inclosing her in a sphere by herself." (54) Singularity and isolation are attributes not only of mystics and saints but also of miltonic devils. One old dame calls her a "brazen hussy" (54); another (a younger woman) pities her and sees that Hester feels pain and stitches "in her heart." (54)

During her first appearance on the scaffold, Hester steadfastly refuses to reveal the name of her child's father. This act, whatever the motivation, is viewed by Arthur Dimmesdale as the "wondrous strength and generosity of a woman's heart." (68) This strength and generosity are consciously developed by Hester after she is released from prison. Much of her time she spends "in making coarse garments for the poor." (83) Her reward for this is "bitterest scorn" (83) and a reviling of "the hand stretched forth to succor them." (84) We are told further that "she was patient,—a martyr, indeed." (85) Her suffering and shame at the hands of society become a continual way of life for Hester. Whenever she enters a church to share "the Sabbath smile of the Universal Father," (85) she finds herself the text of a discourse. She soon learns to especially fear children since they pursue her from a distance with shrill cries "and the utterance of a word." (85) One cannot deny the suffering of Hester during this period of her life. Hawthorne, without question, depicts society and its cruelness in a light of criticism. However, Hester herself is presented in a manner not totally admirable. Why she chose to stay and suffer the scorn of the public is treated ambiguously by Hawthorne. We are told that two reasons exist in her head. One is that she wishes to remain where "there trode the feet of one with whom she deemed herself connected in a union, that, unrecognized on earth, would bring them together before the bar of final judgment, and make that their marriage-altar, for a joint futurity of endless retribution." (80) The other reason is her belief that here "had been the scene of her guilt, and here should be the scene of her earthly punishment." (80) Either (or both) of these reasons is partially true. As a reader, we are never given certitude as to a single, unambiguous motive behind her choice to stay in the village.

In addition to the dual reasons for her choice of residency, we also find two different interpretations in regard to the bright red dresses with which Hester clothes Pearl. Certainly Pearl has become a symbol in the village. The question of interpreting the symbol adds to the tension of the various parties in the story. Mr. Wilson, who, along with Master Bellingham, desires to remove Pearl from Hester's care and instruction, fears that Hester has "no better thought than to make a mountebank of her child!" (114) Hester, and later Dimmesdale, argues that Pearl is dressed in red because "she is my torture, none the less! Pearl keeps me here in life! Pearl punishes me too! See ye not, she is the scarlet letter. . ." (113)

Hester, of course, does keep Pearl and slowly manages to win over the minds and hearts of even the most sour and wrinkled of the society. She helps troubled households in "all seasons of calamity." (161) In fact, she becomes a self-ordained "Sister of Mercy" to the villagers. Their admiration becomes so deep that she is not looked upon as a sinner but as a saint; the scarlet symbol ceases, in their minds, to stand for adulteress but rather means "Able." (161)

But though Hester conforms to the norms of society for seven years, she still remains a revolutionary at heart. "It is remarkable," Hawthorne tells us, "that persons who speculate the most boldly often conform with the most perfect quietude to the external regulations of society." (164) Her most radical speculations would "undermine the foundations of the Puritan establishment." (165) She continuously examines the relationship between men and women and reaches several conclusions. "As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew. Then the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified, before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position." (165) We are never told what "system" is to be torn down; nor are we told what "nature" of men is to be modified; nor are we given any specific information on the "hereditary habit" of men. Neither is there any detail about the "fair and suitable position" for women. We are, again, free to speculate and argue. We can, however, reach one conclusion about Hester; that is, she is a complex, deep, mysterious woman. As such, she defies simplistic interpretations that would make her either a singular saint or a singular sinner.

The previous seven years of "outlaw and ignominy" (200) prepare Hester for her meeting with Arthur Dimmesdale in the woods. She learns, from an estranged point of view, to criticize all human institutions and "whatever priests or legislators had established." (199) "Shame, Despair, Solitude" become her teachers and make her strong, but "taught her much amiss." (200) This strength enables her to decide for Arthur that he will seek a new life of freedom—"of breathing the wild, free atmosphere of an unredeemed, unchristianized, lawless region." (201) To reinforce the decision, Hester removes her scarlet symbol, throws it across the brook and states, as a true romantic, that "The past is gone! Wherefore should we linger upon it now?. . .I undo it all, and make it as it had never been!" (202) This flush of joy is short-lived, however, for Pearl soon after rejects both Hester without her symbolic "A" and the kiss tendered by her father.

It is an easy thing to read this chapter as a beautiful illustration of two lovers who are reunited in purpose and love. Hawthorne, however, is not so certain that the compact in the woods is rooted in love and truth. In a heavily symbolic journey from the woods back to the village, Arthur encounters what to him is a series of temptations: to blaspheme the Eucharist, to scandalize an ancient widow, to speak obscenely to a young maiden and a group of children, and finally to utter oaths with drunken sailors. He finally encounters Mistress Hibbins, or perhaps imagines it, because Hawthorne tells us this encounter, "if it were a real incident, did but show his sympathy and fellowship with wicked mortals and the world of perverted spirits." (222) Arthur even goes so far as to reexamine his meeting with Hester in the woods as a meeting with Satan. "Am I mad? or am I given over utterly to the fiend? Did I make a contract with him in the forest, and sign it with my blood?" (220) To a Puritan the answer would be a firm "yes." It is possible to see Hester as a satanic figure—if we view her ideas from the Puritan perspective of Dimmesdale; and it is precisely this juxtaposition of elation and temptation that creates the conflict within Dimmesdale and the reader.

In contrast to the romantic rejection of the "dead" past by Hester, Arthur flees to his study (next to the cemetery) and books (voices of dead authors), especially the Bible with Moses and the prophets (all long dead) "speaking to him." (223) It is at this point that Arthur realizes that "another man had returned out of the forest; a wiser one; with a knowledge of hidden mysteries which the simplicity of the former never could have reached." (223) But the question remains—is the new man one who will reject his religion and people for Hester or one who will reject Hester for his religion and beliefs? He merely tells Chillingworth that he is going "to another world" (224) within the next year. What "other world" he has in mind could be seen variously as a new country or a spiritual world (death).

The theme of a resurrected Dimmesdale is brought to fruition in the third scaffold chapter. At his moment of death he appears as a strong, honest person. He admits that "the law we broke!—the sin here so awfully revealed!—let these alone be in thy thoughts! I fear! I fear!" (256) In answer to Hester's desire to spend eternity together, Arthur replies, "God knows; and he is merciful! He hath proved his mercy, most of all, in my afflictions." (256) To Dimmesdale, tribulation is treasure; it is redemptive. His perspective is that of a Puritan believer; it is a perspective that Hester rejects throughout the novel, and which makes the gulf between them all the more distant with Dimmesdale's final "Praised be his name! His will be done!" (257)

Hester, unlike Arthur, never does repent. Her perspective remains that of a woman warring with the world and its institutions. After departing with Pearl and her inheritance, Hester remained removed from the Puritan village for "many years." (261) Why she returned after many years is never made clear by Hawthorne. It is important, however, to note that the return is of her own free will and for purposes of penitence (not repentance as in Dimmesdale's case) (263). She soon becomes a comforter and counselor to women, assuring them of her firm belief that "a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness." (263) Hester further acknowledges that earlier in life she "had vainly imagined that she herself might be the destined prophetess." (263) She further recognizes that the new woman will demonstrate "how sacred love should make us happy, by the truest test of a life successful to such an end! (263) She, of course, is not happy, for as the narrator tells us, "so said Hester Prynne, and glanced her sad eyes downward at the scarlet letter." (264) The incomplete comparison of the "surer ground of mutual happiness" never tells us "surer" than what. It is, as so much that appears earlier in the novel, ambiguous and unstated.

The death of Hester many, many years later results in her burial near another grave, "an old and sunken one." (264) Almost everyone reads this as Arthur's grave, but the novel doesn't state this. It could just as easily be Chillingworth's grave. A case could be made for either interpretation, but whether the grave belongs to Roger or Arthur, Hester still remains a singular woman, for there was "a space between, as if the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle." (264) Thus, Hawthorne ends the novel as he began, with a graveyard.

As a reader it is extremely difficult to find evidence for a justification of Hester's or Arthur's actions. There is no glorification of the act of adultery, no denial of the consequences of rejecting societal and spiritual norms. I can cite one unbalanced and biased passage in the novel, but it is critical of Hester, not supportive. If Hawthorne ever dropped his narrative mask for an instant, I suspect it was on the final scaffold scene. Here, as Dimmesdale lay dying, Pearl kissed his lips, and "as her tears fell upon her father's cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it." (256) The same can not be said about Hester. Therein lies the real sorrow of the novel.

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A Rationale for Reading John Knowles' A Separate Peace

It is hard to imagine a book that has more to say to youth about to enter the conflict-ridden world than John Knowles' A Separate Peace. Huck Finn and A Catcher in the Rye come immediately to mind as forbears of this novel of maturation, and if Knowles lacks the range and dramatic intensity of Twain, he at least provides more answers than Salinger to the vexing problems of adolescence,

The novel is set at Devon, a small New England prep school, during the Second World War. The details and atmosphere of such a school are realistically rendered in the dormitories and playing fields, the lawn parties and the truancies. Accuracy of fact and mood makes this an interesting and gripping story. But it is more than just a good story because it has at least two other dimensions. From beginning to end little Devon is impinged upon by the world at war, so much so that the ordinary round of prep school activities takes on a militaristic flavoring. Along with the outward pressures exerted by the war are the internal pressures, particularly in the narrator Gene, which lead to self-discovery and an acceptance of human ideals and human frailties. It is the integration of these three focuses that makes this such an effective and satisfying novel.

The novel opens with the narrator's return to Devon fifteen years after the action of the story he is about to tell. He presents two realistic scenes that later become associated with important events in the story: the First Academy Building, with its unusually hard marble floors that cause the second break in Phineas's leg; and the tree, that real and symbolic tree which is the place of Finny's initial accident and the presentation of lost innocence. These detailed places occasion the narrator's meditation, and suddenly through flashback we are transported to the idyllic summer of 1942. This framework narrative and flashback technique is important because it sets up a vehicle for conveying judgments to the reader about character and action from two perspectives: sometimes we are getting Gene's reaction at the moment and other times we are receiving the retrospective judgment of the mature man.

I mention this narrative technique not merely as a matter of literary style but as an indication of the serious, thoughtful quality of the novel. The author wishes us to see the growth of Gene and at the same time experience an exciting story, not a philosophical or psychological tract. This is deftly accomplished by means of the dual perspective. The following comment on the important motif of fear illustrates the mature man reflecting on the entire experience at Devon:

> Preserved along with it, like stale air in an unopened room, was the well-known fear which had surrounded and filled those days, so much of it that I hadn't even known it was there. Because, unfamiliar with the absence of fear and what that was like, I had not been able to identify its presence.
>
> Looking back now across fifteen years, I could see with great clarity the fear I had lived in, which must mean that in the interval I had succeeded in a very important undertaking: I must have made my escape from it. (p. 2)

This statement is more philosophical and judgmental than most later reflective statements, since at this point the story proper has not even begun. But the mature man is heard at intervals throughout the novel, as in this analogy of war to a wave:

> So the war swept over like a wave at the seashore, gathering power and size as it bore on us... I did not stop to think that one wave is inevitably followed by another even larger and more powerful, when the tide is coming in. (p. 101)

Comments such as these encourage the reader to pause in the story and reflect on the significance of events, certainly an important thing to do with any novel but particularly with a novel of maturation.

The story proper begins in the summer of 1942. It is the calm before the storm, the storm of course being the world at war. For these boys—primarily Gene, Finny, and Leper—the war is still a year away. Even the faculty at Devon treat the reduced summer school class with a bemused tolerance. This summertime Devon is like Eden: the sun always seems to shine, the days endlessly filled with games on the playing fields. This Eden also has its tree and, like the original, this is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. At first, however, it is just a tree, something to jump from into the clear cool waters of the Devon River. As idyllic as this summer and this particular game of jumping from the tree are, hints of the impending war keep creeping in. Jumping from the tree becomes a test of courage, a kind of boot camp obstacle. So, taking a cue from war literature, the boys call their jumping group the Super Suicide Society of the Summer Session. Always the consummate athlete, Finny jumps first with fluid grace and without apparent fear. Gene is reluctant, but cannot refuse the challenge. The two close buddies cement their friendship in this test. Leper, at least on this first occasion, does not jump. This foreshadows his later inability to cope with the pressures of the war. Already the superficial harmony of the summer is disrupted by this competition which separates the boys according to those who possess the particular skills and temperament necessary in the world of war and those who don't. The scene is a preparation for the key event of the book where Finny breaks his leg, and an early reminder that Eden cannot really exist in this world.

Certainly not all generations have had to face impending world war, but psychologists today tell us that the fear of nuclear holocaust is very much on the minds of our youth. Though this is not the same as Gene's and Finny's virtual certainty of going to war, this fear does add a stark relevance for young readers of this book today. For the Devon youth and our own there is a similar sense of a terrible demon lurking in the woods beyond the playing fields, threatening at any moment to swallow the children in their innocent play.

In A Separate Peace, however, Knowles plumbs more deeply than the war on the surface. We get hint after hint, culminating in Gene's and Finny's awareness of what really happened in the tree, that the war is also within, its battles waged in the individual breast and then subsequently between bosom buddies.

Gene and Finny have a special relationship but it is not immune—at least on Gene's part—from the petty jealousies that infect most relationships. In Gene's own words, Finny is "too good to be true." He plays games, like the blitzball he invented, for the sheer joy of exhibiting his remarkable athletic skills. He is a natural. One day he breaks the school swimming record in the hundred yard freestyle, with Gene as the only witness, but has no desire to repeat it in an official meet. The idea of having done it is enough. And because of his affability, he can talk his way out of almost any jam, as he did the day he was caught at the headmaster's lawn party wearing the school tie for a belt. One side of Gene admires Finny for these feats, while another, darker side envies him for his ability to glide through life unscathed. As Gene says about Finny after the party at the headmaster's:

> He had gotten away with everything. I felt a sudden stab of disappointment. That was because I just wanted to see some more excitement; that must have been it. (p. 21)

The last statement is a rationalization, and a weak one at that. Knowles lets the rationalization stand without a direct statement of truth from the older man's perspective, but the irony leaves no doubt as to Gene's true feelings. Surely any reader, and particularly the youthful one, can identify with this ambivalent reaction to a friend's success. In the end Gene comes to understand and accept these feelings, and the book as a whole makes the statement that only by becoming conscious of these feelings, and coming to terms with them, can a person grow toward maturity. Refusing to face up to jealousies leads only to tragedies such as the one that occurs in this book.

Gene's envy of Finny comes to a head when he concludes wrongly that Finny is keeping him occupied with games so that his grades will suffer. Gene is the best student in the class and Finny the best athlete, but Gene thinks Finny wants him to jeoparddize his supremacy in academics so Finny can shine more brightly. It is at this juncture in the book that the boys go off to the tree for what turns out to be the last meeting of the Super Suicide Society of the Summer Session.

The basic facts concerning Finny's fall from the tree that results in his broken leg are revealed in the first narration of the event, but the reader has to wait for the corroborating evidence presented by Leper months later at a mock trial, along with his peculiar emotional and artistic perception of the event. The facts as presented by Gene are that his knees bent and he "jounced the limb." It is impossible to know how much, if any, forethought was involved in the disastrous movement itself. What is clear from the juxtaposition of this event and the commentary that precedes it is that Gene reacts in some recess of his being, not, as we might have expected, to get back at Finny for hampering him in his studies, but out of a sudden awareness that Finny was not jealous of him, was not competing. It goes back to the statement that Finny is too good to be true. This is a particularly keen insight into the human heart; namely, that we often strike out at others not because of the harm they have done us but because their goodness sheds light on our own mistrustfulness.

In the case of Finny, his goodness is of a peculiar kind. He is not good from the faculty's point of view since he does not study very hard and breaks as many of the rules as he can. His is a kind of natural goodness, a harmoniousness with the sun, the earth and its seasons, and his fellow man—so long as his fellow man preserves his imagination and participates in Finny's rituals of celebration. It has justly been said that Finny is not a realistic character, yet he is an interesting one, and something more than a foil for Gene. Most readers have probably had childhood friends with some of the characteristics of Finny; it is in the sum of his parts that he deviates from reality.

Finny is a character fated to die, not because of anything he does, or anything anyone does to him—though Gene's action against him is significant—but because of what he is and what the world is. If the idyllic summer could have lasted forever, then Finny could have lived a full life. If winter Olympic games could have taken the place of fighting troops on skis, then Finny's leg might have been made whole again. But the world is at war and the first casualties—Leper and Finny—are those whose beings are antithetical to the disruption that is war. Finny's harmoniousness cannot coexist with the dislocation of war. Gene humorously acknowledges this when he says:

> "They'd get you some place at the front and there'd be a lull in the fighting, and the next thing anyone knew you'd be over with the Germans or the Japs, asking if they'd like to field a baseball team against our side. You'd be sitting in one of their command posts, teaching them English. Yes, you'd get confused and borrow one of their uniforms, and you'd lend them one of yours. Sure, that's what would happen. You'd get things so scrambled up nobody would know who to fight anymore. You'd make a mess, a terrible mess, Finny, out of the war." (p. 182)

To Finny, the war was like blitzball, a free-flowing, individualistic game, with no allies and no enemies. To Gene, though he doesn't like to admit it, the war was all too real before he even got to it, so much so that his best friend became his enemy.

Leper, the character third in importance in the book, is the one most directly affected by the war and the one whose testimony at the mock trial seals the truth of the tree incident. Leper returns to Devon after having a nervous breakdown in boot camp. He is the most sensitive of all the boys, a loner and a lover of nature. His testimony not only confirms what actually happened in the tree, but also, through descriptive imagery, places the event in the context of the war. Leper's distracted mind remembers all the concrete details of the scene. Finny and Gene were in the tree and Leper was looking up, with the sun in his eyes, "and the rays of the sun were shooting past them, millions of rays shooting past them like—like golden machine-gun fire." And when the two in the tree moved, "they moved like an engine." "The one holding on to the trunk sank for a second, up and down like a piston, and then the other one sank and fell." Leper, who previously saw the world in terms of snails and beaver dams, sees the action in the tree in terms of engines and machine-guns. This is because of what the war has done to him, and more subtly, it is a commentary on how a game in a tree has become a wartime battle. All three boys are pummelled by the machine of war, because, as the book seems to tell us, war is a conditon of the human heart and soul.

The ultimate meaning of this book, and its universal message, is in this idea about war being something that is within us. Of the three characters discussed here, the war within is really only dramatized in Gene, but Gene is the representative boy; Leper and especially Finny are exceptions. Gene is our narrator and it is he with whom we identify. The war may flare out at various times and take on form in France or Germany, Korea or Viet Nam, but when we look for the causes we should look first within. This concept ties together all the strands of the novel.

But as much as this is a book about war—within and without—it is also a book about peace. The human heart, stripped naked to reveal its pride and jealousy, is a cause for sober reflection. But the title, A Separate Peace, encourages the reader to pass with Gene through the sufferings of war to achieve a peace. This peace is based upon understanding and the growth that follows such understanding. Finny achieves one kind of separate peace, the peace of death; it is left to Gene to achieve a separate peace that will allow him to live with himself and others in the adult world, chastened and strengthened by his mistake. His words at the end show us that he has succeeded:

> I never killed anybody and I never developed an intense level of hatred for the enemy. Because my war ended before I ever put on a uniform; I was on active duty all my time at school; I killed my enemy there. (p. 196)

This growth in awareness that leads Gene to his separate peace makes the ending of this book an optimistic one. Some readers seem to feel this book is another Lord of the Flies, a novel that depicts human nature when stripped of social institutions as reverting to a frighteningly depraved state. This is not the case in A Separate Peace. Once recognized and accepted, the war within is tamed.

Furthermore, Knowles does not describe the weakness within as evil, but rather as a form of ignorance. After the mock trial, Gene tries to tell Finny what it was that caused him to jounce the limb: "It was just some ignorance inside me, some crazy thing inside me, something blind, that's all it was." One chapter later war is described in the same terms by the narrator: "Because it seemed clear that wars were not made by generations and their special stupidities, but that wars were made by something ignorant in the human heart." Most ignorance is not invincible; Gene proves this.

A Separate Peace is a novel that should be read by adolescents and adults alike, and it should be discussed openly. Jealousy, misunderstanding, and fear do indeed breed violence when they are kept within. Or they can be liberated, not once and for all perhaps, but over and over again if they are seen for what they are in the light of day. This is all we know of peace in this world.

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Authenticity and Relevance:
Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five

What makes Slaughterhouse-Five unusually interesting or gives it any particular merit? Its interest lies first in the authenticity of its being based on actual experience. Then there is the interest of seeing how a man who has undergone such trauma comes to terms with it and interprets it over the next twenty-five years of his life. More than that, we see how he finds relevance in the experience not just for himself but for us all. He sets his experience in the widest possible context—both real and imagined—of time and space. Slaughterhouse-Five becomes not just a book about the author's experience, but about our experience, the human experience, not alone in the extremes of war but also in the mundanity of "ordinary" death and the daily round of life. The freshness of style, which dares anything, mixing reality and science fiction, tragedy and slapstick, certainly commands attention. The merit lies in how well all this is done—and in the book's moral scrupulousness. Kurt Vonnegut tries to avoid being overbearing or didactic, but the moral commitment in what he writes is unwavering.

Much of Slaughterhouse-Five is fact, some of it autobiographical. Mixed in with history and autobiography is fiction, some of it rather far-fetched science fiction. These "made-up" parts of the story do not conflict with the factual parts, however; in fact, they often help underline the meaning or consequence of actual events. And oftentimes even the science fiction elements seem no more fanciful or perplexing than the factual parts.

Kurt Vonnegut is a veteran. He served with the U.S. Infantry in the Second World War and was captured by the Germans in the Battle of the Bulge. On February 13, 1945, while he was being held a prisoner of war in Dresden, that city was bombed heavily by Allied aircraft. These air raids created a huge firestorm, similar in effect to a nuclear explosion, which destroyed most of the city and left tens of thousands dead. Vonnegut survived in an underground shelter—the meat storage locker which gives the book its title. The horrors awaiting him on emerging from the shelter were compounded when he was put to work digging corpses out of the rubble.

Understandably, these events—war, capture, the raid and its aftermath—deeply impressed the young Vonnegut. The irony of being an American of German stock who is nearly killed first by his ancestral kinsmen and then by his own comrades does not escape him. After the war, as he went from journalism to public-relations work for G.E. to short story writing to creating novels, he kept trying to come to terms with this experience and to write about it. He found it extremely difficult; many, many stories and five other novels came first, but in 1969 the "Dresden novel" was at last published. The book, and the film version which followed it, drew large audiences and won acclaim.

One factual element of the novel, then, is that much that happens to its main character, Billy Pilgrim, as soldier and P.O.W., really happened to Kurt Vonnegut. He even worked in a factory making malt supplement for pregnant women and was punished for eating some (he lost 35 pounds while imprisoned). Besides drawing on experience, Vonnegut uses the most authoritative study of the Dresden raid, David Irving's The Destruction of Dresden, as the source of additional information. Other factual material in the novel is both personal (the O'Hares are real people; so was the soldier who was shot over a teapot) and historical (the Children's Crusade of 1213, Dresden: History, Stage and Gallery by Mary Endell, material relating to Hiroshima, the biblical accounts of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah).

While Slaughterhouse-Five has a foundation in history and fact, that does not make it a "realistic" novel in the usual sense. The story is that Billy Pilgrim, a G.I., gets lost behind enemy lines in 1944. He meets other American scouts, is taken prisoner, marched miles in a steadily growing stream of American captives, then finally put on a train and shipped to a prison camp. This invovles days of shock and privation, and Billy's mind wanders. In fact, we are told, he becomes "unstuck in time." At any moment he will flip out and visit various points in his future or his past. This continues to happen to him for the rest of his life. Furthermore, in his future, he is taken by extraterrestrials to a zoo on their planet, Tralfamador, and mated with a movie starlet called Montana Wildhack. As the story follows the life of Billy then, it does so not chronologically but as he sees it himself, full of fits and starts, of jumps from one time or place to another, across a lifetime and a galaxy. So we see his postwar married life, his space travels, his becoming a preacher, even his death, before we get to the chronologically earlier climax, the Dresden firestorm.

This unusual organization of the book is perhaps its most unique and significant stylistic element. It can be said that on the one hand this connects the parts in an unusual formation to give them added power, while on the other hand it scatters them in a disordering fashion. The way in which the parts of the story are mixed, out of order, like playing cards shuffled out of suit and sequence, makes the book resemble a collage or montage. In these the many pictures looked at one at a time may seem to have no connection; looked at together, connections begin to emerge and we see a pattern of relationship. But the "chopping up" of the story prevents its becoming too easy and rational and explanatory; the chaos, arbitrariness and senselessness of what happens are reflected in their portrayal.

Telling connections occur because Vonnegut can juxtapose things which chronologically might be remote; Dresden with the destruction of Sodom, Hiroshima, the Tralfamadorian version of the end of the world, even the sacking of Dresden in 1760. Vonnegut details the firestorm's unique horror, yet also connects it with a timeless, universal pattern of destruction. This was an awful thing, he seems to say, hideous beyond imagining, and yet it is actually like others throughout history, a recurring horror that we must stop—and yet seemingly cannot stop. Viewed this way, the novel is an attempt to deal with the Dresden experience rationally, to make it mean something, even if it only stands as a symbol of meaninglessness, of the great indecipherable forces in life. He even connects it with the deaths of all people and things around us. Each one is punctuated with a "So it goes." Death is part of daily living, as inescapable as breathing, but that does not make it easier to bear.

Viewed the other way, the fragmented, chopped-up form of the book looks like an effort to resist rationalization. Narrative, the telling of a story, by its very nature tries to make sense of what it relates. It pre-supposes beginning and end, cause and effect, progress, revelation, resolution. It tries to make order out of chaos. Vonnegut experiments with the opposite; a fragmented text that does not falsify the nature of its content. This firestorm, this explosion of a city, he says, was a moment of disintegration; he will not reconstruct it, as it were, by a narrative that makes everything explained and rational. In the story, Billy Pilgrim at one point sees a war film forwards and then backwards. Viewed backwards it shows planes sucking bombs up from the ruins, which then leap up as complete buildings, and so on. That is what narrative does, in effect, and a story which makes sense out of Dresden has it backwards.

These aspects of how Slaughterhouse-Five is written help make it a unique and moving book which tries to match itself in form to the nature of the experience it portrays. The Red Badge of Courage, another American classic on war mentioned in Slaughterhouse-Five, centers on a blood stained bandage which should be a symbol of bravery and which in fact comes to instill courage. Meaning grows. Dresden's disintegration is the center of this novel which refuses to explain, justify or find meaning in mass destruction. The book ends with a bird poised over the rubble and corpses asking, "Poo-tee-weet?" No answer; just a question in an incomprehensible language.

This is a recent kind of fiction, often called "post-modernism" (as running counter to earlier twentieth century modernism which did try to find meaning or significance at the center of seemingly meaningless existence). Its freshness and invention can be exciting, offering vivid new ways in which to see things. Flying saucers in a book about a major human disaster and perhaps the most traumatic event in its author's life? It may sound flippant, yet it provides rare possibilities. Billy's extraterrestrial love nest with Montana offers a cosy escape from a cruel reality: we come to share his yearning for a more comfortable place away from the horror of a world where teenaged girls are boiled alive in a water tower. Or, to illustrate another characteristic of this technique, Vonnegut's freedom to pop himself into the story and say, "That was me, I was there," gives the ultimate label of authenticity.

In the first chapter, Vonnegut recalls being asked by Harrison Starr if this is an anti-war novel and answering, "I guess." To this Starr responds that he might as well write an anti-glacier novel, because wars would always come and "were as easy to stop as glaciers." He writes the book anyway, less, perhaps, in the hope of "stopping" war than of making us think about it, and about "plain old death." Slaughterhouse-Five is provocative as a war novel; it carefully avoids categorical thinking about nationalities, for example, cutting through jingoism and stereotypes to emphasize common bonds of humanity. Above all, Vonnegut emphasizes the helplessness of those caught up in war. There are no characters in war, he says, only pawns, victims. Lots of victims are children and, indeed, even the combatants seem like children swept up in events beyond their control. The urgency and compassion of Vonnegut, who experienced war as little more than a child, who saw children dead in the hundreds, who fathered three children and adopted more, shows through.

The concern for children runs so strong partly because this book emphasizes the nature of modern war. Perhaps soldiers have always been young, little more than children, but modern, aerial warfare has shifted the highest death tolls of war to civilian cities, to women and children. Billy Pilgrim, like his creator, survives the muddle of the battlefield to almost perish in just such a setting. Slaughterhouse-Five's examination of that kind of warfare is almost unique. It is also very forward looking; the Dresden firestorm closely resembles a nuclear apocalypse.

Yet even while Vonnegut seeks to de-romanticize war, insists on its horrors, and rejects jingoistic nationalism as a rallying cry for war, he is not unpatriotic nor simply what is often dismissed as "a bleeding heart." The book is not un-American, nor anti any other nationality, come to that; nationality appears mostly an accident of birth. The novel is staunchly pro-human, however, and insists on the tragedy of human suffering and death regardless of nationality. But even about this it is not mawkish or demonstrative. Death by war may be particularly callous or unnecessary, but death, "plain old death," will be there anyway. This sense of inevitability imparts an almost stoical tone to the book. It leads toward the idea that, given that we all must die anyway, often cruelly or prematurely or nonsensically, surely that makes it the more imperative that we treat each other with understanding and dignity. The commonness of death does not trivialize it; it makes life the more important. "So it goes" after the deaths of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King and Vonnegut's own father becomes a cry of half-resigned grief, not of dismissal.

It is here, then, that we see the moral core of this novel. It is one to which the author commits himself, opening his heart in the opening and conclusion of the novel to talk of his struggle to write it and of the griefs in his own life. He invests himself; this is not a detached, third-person novel where the author simply disappears behind the backdrop of his drama. The word "crusade" in the subtitle seems apt: Vonnegut extends himself in a moral commitment.

One last point. Objection has sometimes been voiced to a profanity used by one of the soldiers in this story. That may be a little like the executing of Edgar Derby over a teapot amidst the destruction of a city. The soldier's uttered profanity is as nothing beside the obscenities of war we are shown. This emphasizes one of Vonnegut's points, that we are constantly indignant over the wrong things and righteously irrelevant. Besides this, Billy Pilgrim is explicitly likened to Jesus Christ in this novel, and like Jesus he is reviled and crucified. His is a contemporary reviling, in language undeniably common among American soldiers.

Slaughterhouse-Five, then, is socially relevant, talking not just about one war, or war in general, but about society and about the human condition in a more universal timeless way. It seems conspicuous in recent writing not just in showing a moral center of any sort but an extraordinarily powerful one. It is fascinating as an example of contemporary fiction, showing the possibilities of applying science fiction, fragmented narrative, a mix of fact and fantasy, cinematic techniques and radio comedy to the serious novel. And it surely teaches important lessons about the possibilities of integrating autobiography into a sharable art-form, or of building from personal experience to a broader human understanding.

But this novel seems important not just in its ideas, or its morality, or as an example of modern fiction, or for what it might teach about how to write, but for its lesson in thinking. It is provocative, even maddening to some, because of its irreverence. It challenges sacred cows, set ideas, merely traditional ways of thinking. And it does not do this irresponsibly, but from the foundation of a moral human decency. This kind of invitation to openness is surely the essence of education.

Finally, if one would know what Kurt Vonnegut has written in defense of his own writing, one should read the first chapter of his later book, Palm Sunday.

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In Defense of To Kill A Mockingbird

The critical career of To Kill a Mockingbird is a late twentieth century case study of censorship. When Harper Lee's novel about a small southern town and its prejudices was published in 1960, the book received favorable reviews in professional journals and the popular press. Typical of that opinion, Booklist's reviewer called the book "melodramatic" and noted "traces of sermonizing," but the book was recommended for library purchase, commending its "rare blend of wit and compassion" (September, 1960, p. 23). Reviewers did not suggest that the book was young adult literature, or that it belonged in adolescent collections; perhaps that is why no one mentioned the book's language or violence. In any event, reviewers seemed inclined to agree that To Kill a Mockingbird was a worthwhile interpretation of the South's existing social structures during the 1930's. In 1961 the book won the Pulitzer Prize Award, the Alabama Library Association Book Award, and the Brotherhood Award of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. It seemed that Harper Lee's blend of family history, local custom, and restrained sermonizing was important reading, and with a young girl between the ages of six and nine as the main character, To Kill a Mockingbird moved rapidly into junior and senior high school libraries and curriculum. The book was not destined to be studied by college students. Southern literature's critics rarely mentioned it; few university professors found it noteworthy enough to "teach" as an examplar southern novel.

By the mid-sixties To Kill a Mockingbird had a solid place in junior and senior high American literature studies. Once discovered by southern parents, the book's solid place became shaky indeed. Sporadic lawsuits arose. In most cases the complaint against the book was by conservatives who disliked the portrayal of whites. Typically, the Hanover County School Board in Virginia first ruled the book "immoral," then withdrew their criticism and declared that the ruckus "was all a mistake" (Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom, March 1966, 16). By 1968 the National Education Association listed the book among those which drew the most criticism from private groups. Ironically it was rated directly behind Little Black Sambo (Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom, March 1968, 22). And then the seventies arrived.

Things had changed in the South during the sixties. Two national leaders who had supported integration and had espoused the ideals of racial equality were assassinated in southern regions. When John F. Kennedy was killed in Texas on November 22, 1963, many southerners were shocked. Populist attitudes of racism were declining, and in the aftermath of the tragedy southern politics began to change. Lyndon Johnson gained the presidency; blacks began to seek and win political offices. Black leader Martin Luther King had stressed the importance of racial equality, always using Mahatma Gandhi's strategy of nonviolent action and civil disobedience. A brilliant orator, King grew up in the South; the leader of the SCLC, he lived in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1968, while working on a garbage strike in Memphis, King was killed. The death of this 1965 Nobel Peace Prize winner was further embarrassment for white southerners. Whites began to look at public values anew, and gradually southern blacks found experiences in the South more tolerable. In 1971 one Atlanta businessman observed, "The liberation thinking is here. Blacks are more together. With the doors opening wider, this area is the mecca..." (Book, 56). Southern arguments against To Kill a Mockingbird subsided. The Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom contained no record of southern court cases during the seventies or eighties. The book had sustained itself during the first period of sharp criticism; it had survived regional protests from the area it depicted.

The second onslaught of attack came from new groups of censors, and it came during the late seventies and early eighties. Private sectors in the Midwest and suburban East began to demand the book's removal from school libraries. Groups, such as the Eden Valley School Committee in Minnesota, claimed that the book was too laden with profanity (Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom, March 1978, 31). In Vernon, New York, Reverend Carl Hadley threatened to establish a private Christian school because public school libraries contained such "filthy, trashy sex novels" as A Separate Peace and To Kill a Mockingbird (Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom, May 1980, 62). And finally, blacks began to censor the book. In Warren, Indiana, three black parents resigned from the township Human Relations Advisory Council when the Warren County school administration refused to remove the book from Warren junior high school classes. They contended that the book "does psychological damage to the positive integration process and represents institutionalized racism" (Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom, March 1982, 47). Thus, censorship of To Kill a Mockingbird swung from the conservative right to the liberal left. Factions representing racists, religious sects, concerned parents, and minority groups vocally demanded the book's removal from public schools. With this kind of offense, what makes To Kill a Mockingbird worth defending and keeping?

When Harper Lee first introduces Scout in To Kill a Mockingbird, she is almost six years old. By the end of the book Scout is in the third grade. Throughout the book events are described by the adult Scout who looks back upon life in the constricted society of a small southern town. Since it is the grown-up Scout's story, the young Scout Finch becomes a memory more than a reality. The book is not a vivid recollection of youth gone by so much as a recounting of days gone by. Yet, Scout Finch's presence as the events' main observer establishes two codes of honor, that of the child and of the adult. The code of adult behavior shows the frailty of adult sympathy for humanity and emphasizes its subsequent effect upon overt societal attitudes. Throughout the book Scout sees adults accepting society's rules rather than confronting them. When Scout finds school troublesome Atticus tells Scout that they will continue reading together at night, then adds, "you'd better not say anything at school about our agreement'' (Lee, 34). He explains away the Maycomb Ku Klux Klan, saying, ''it was a political organization more than anything. Besides, they couldn't find anybody to scare'' (Lee, 136). And when he discusses the case of a black man's word against a white man's with his brother, Atticus says, ''The jury couldn't possibly be expected to take Tom Robinson's word against the Ewells'... Why reasonable people go stark raving mad when anything involving a Negro comes up, is something I don't pretend to understand'' (Lee, 84). The author tells us that Atticus knew Scout was listening in on this conversation and purposely explained that he had been court appointed, adding, ''I'd hoped to get through life without a case of this kind...'' (Lee, 84). And when the jury does see fit to try and condemn Tom Robinson, Scout's older brother Jem and good friend Dill see the white southern world for what it is: a world of hypocrisy, a world burdened with old racist attitudes which have nothing to do with humanity. Jem says, ''I always thought Maycomb folks were the best folks in the world, least that's what they seemed like'' (Lee, 197). Dill decides he will be a new kind of clown. ''I'm gonna stand in the middle of the ring and laugh at the folks... Every one of 'em oughta be ridin' broomsticks'' (Lee, 198).

The majority of white adults in Maycomb are content to keep blacks, women and children in their place. Atticus's only sister comes to live with the family and constantly tells Scout she must learn how to act, that she has a place in society: womanhood with its stifling position of prim behavior and wagging tongues is the essence of southern decorum. Even Atticus, the liberal minded hero, says that perhaps it's best to keep women off the juries of Alabama because, ''I doubt if we'd ever get a complete case tried—the ladies'd be interrupting to ask questions'' (Lee, 202). By the end of the book Scout has accepted the rules of southern society. The once hated aunt who insisted upon Scout's transformation into a proper young lady becomes an idol for her ability to maintain proper deportment during a crisis. Scout follows suit, reasoning ''if Aunty could be a lady at a time like this, so could I'' (Lee, 217).

The courtroom trial is a real example of Southern justice and Southern local color storytelling. Merrill Skaggs has analyzed the local color folklore of southern trials in his book The Folk of Southern Fiction. Skaggs comments that there is a formula for court hearings, and he suggests that local color stories show that justice in the courtroom is, in fact, less fair than justice in the streets (Skaggs 94). He discusses justice in terms of the black defendent, saying, ''Implicit in these stories...is an admission that Negroes are not usually granted equal treatment before the law, that a Negro is acquitted only when he has a white champion'' (Skaggs, 96). During the trial in To Kill a Mockingbird Tom Robinson says he ran because he feared southern justice. He ran, he says, because he was ''scared I'd hafta face up to what I didn't do'' (Lee, 182). Dill is one of Lee's young protagonists. He is angered by the southern court system. The neglected son of an itinerant mother, Dill is a stereotype of southern misfits. Lee doesn't concentrate upon Dill's background; she concentrates upon his humanity. The courtroom scene is more than local humor to him. It is appalling. When he flees the trial, Scout follows. She cannot understand why Dill is upset, but the notorious rich ''drunk'' with ''mixed children'' can. He sees Dill and says, ''it just makes you sick, doesn't it?'' (Lee, 183). No one, save Jem and his youthful converts, expects Atticus to win. The black minister who has befriended the children warns, ''I ain't ever seen any jury decide in favor of a colored man over a white man'' (Lee, 191). In the end Atticus says, ''They've done it before and they did it tonight and they'll do it again and when they do it—seems that only children weep'' (Lee, 195). And Miss Maudie tells the children, ''as I waited I thought, Atticus Finch won't win, he can't win, but he's the only man in these parts who can keep a jury out so long in a case like that.'' Then she adds, ''we're making a step—it's just a baby-step, but it's a step (Lee, 197).

In his book, Skaggs points out that obtaining justice through the law is not as important as the courtroom play in southern trials and that because the courtroom drama seldom brings real justice, people condone ''violence within the community'' (96-99). Atticus realizes that ''justice'' is often resolved outside of the court, and so he is not surprised when the sheriff and the town leaders arrive at his house one night. The men warn Atticus that something might happen to Tom Robinson if he is left in the local jail; the sheriff suggests that he can't be responsible for any violence which might occur. One of the men says, ''--don't see why you touched it [the case] in the first place... You've got everything to lose from this, Atticus. I mean everything'' (Lee, 135-136). Because Atticus wants courtroom justice to resolve this conflict, he tries to protect his client. On the night before the trial Atticus moves to the front of the jail, armed only with his newspaper. While there, the local lynching society arrives, ready to take justice into its own hands. Scout, Jem, and Dill have been watching in their own dark corner, but the crowd bothers Scout and so she bursts from her hiding spot. As she runs by, Scout smells ''stale whiskey and pigpen,'' and she realizes that these are not the same men who came to the house earlier. It is Scout's innocence, her misinterpretation of the seriousness of the scene, her ability to recognize one of the farmers and to talk with guileless ease to that man about his own son which saves Tom Robinson from being lynched. The next morning Jem suggests that the men would have killed Atticus if Scout hadn't come along. Atticus who is more familiar with adult southern violence, says ''might have hurt me a little, but son, you'll understand folks a little better when you're older. A mob's always made up of people, no matter what... Every little mob in every little southern town is always made up of people you know—doesn't say much for them does it? (Lee, 146). Lynching is a part of regional lore in the South. In his study of discrimination, Wallace Mendelson pointed out that the frequency of lynchings as settlement for black/white problems is less potent than the terrorizing aspect of hearing about them (144). In this case, the terrorizing aspect of mob rule had been viewed by the children. Its impact would remain.

After the trial Bob Ewell is subjected to a new kind of Southern justice, a polite justice. Atticus explains, ''He thought he'd be a hero, but all he got for his pain was...was, okay, we'll convict this Negro but get back to your dump" (Lee, 228). Ewell spits on Atticus, cuts a hole in the judge's screen, and harasses Tom's wife. Atticus ignores his insults and figures, "He'll settle down when the weather changes" (Lee, 228). Scout and Jem never doubt that Ewell is serious, and they are afraid. Their early childhood experiences with the violence and hypocrisy in southern white society have taught them not to trust Atticus's reasoning but they resolve to hide their fear from the adults around them. When Ewell does strike for revenge, he strikes at children. The sheriff understands this kind of violence. It is similar to lynching violence. It strikes at a minority who cannot strike back, and it creates a terror in law-abiding citizens more potent than courtroom justice. It shows that southern honor has been consistently dealt with outside of the courtoom.

Harper Lee's book concerns the behavior of Southerners in their claim for "honor," and Boo Radley's presence in the story reinforces that claim. When Boo was young and got into trouble, his father claimed the right to protect his family name. He took his son home and kept him at the house. When Boo attacked him, Mr. Radley again asked for family privilege; Boo was returned to his home, this time never to surface on the porch or in the yard during the daylight hours. The children are fascinated with the Boo Radley legend. They act it out, and they work hard to make Boo come out. And always, they wonder what keeps him inside. After the trial, however, Jem says, "I think I'm beginning to understand something. I think I'm beginning to understand why Boo Radley's stayed shut up in the house...it's because he wants to stay inside" (Lee, 208).

Throughout the book Boo is talked about and wondered over, but he does not appear in Scout's existence until the end when he is needed by the children. When no one is near to protect them from death, Boo comes out of hiding. In an act of violence he kills Bob Ewell, and with that act he becomes a part of southern honor. He might have been a hero. Had a jury heard the case, his trial would have entertained the entire region. The community was unsettled from the rape trial, and this avenged death in the name of southern justice would have set well in Maycomb, Alabama. Boo Radley has been outside of southern honor, however, and he is a shy man. Lee has the sheriff explain the pitfalls of southern justice when he says, "Know what'd happen then? All the ladies in Maycomb includin' my wife'd be knocking on his door bringing angel food cakes. To my way of thinkin'...that's a sin... If it was any other man it'd be different" (Lee, 250-251). The reader discovers that southern justice through the courts is not a blessing. It is a carnival.

When Harper Lee was five years old the Scottsboro trial began. In one of the most celebrated southern trials, nine blacks were accused of raping two white girls. The first trial took place in Jackson County, Alabama. All nine were convicted. Monroeville, Lee's hometown, knew about the case. Retrials continued for six years, and with each new trial it became more obvious that southern justice for blacks was different from southern justice for whites. Harper Lee's father was a lawyer during that time. Her mother's maiden name was Finch. Harper Lee attended law school, a career possibility suggested to Scout by well meaning adults in the novel. To Kill a Mockingbird is set in 1935, midpoint for the Scottsboro case.

Scout Finch faces the realities of southern society within the same age span that Harper Lee faced Scottsboro. The timeline is also the same. Although Lee's father was not the Scottsboro lawyer who handled that trial, he was a southern man of honor related to the famous gentleman soldier, Robert E. Lee. It is likely that Harper Lee's father was the author's model for Atticus Finch and that the things Atticus told Scout were the kinds of things Ama Lee told his daughter. The attitudes depicted are ones Harper Lee grew up with, both in terms of family pride and small town prejudices.

The censors' reactions to To Kill a Mockingbird were reactions to issues of race and justice. Their moves to ban the book derive from their own perspectives of the book's theme. Their "reader's response" criticism, usually based on one reading of the book, was personal and political. They needed to ban the book because it told them something about American society that they did not want to hear. That is precisely the problem facing any author of realistic fiction. Once the story becomes real, it can become grim. An author will use first-person flashback in story in order to let the reader live in another time, another place. Usually the storyteller is returning for a second view of the scene. The teller has experienced the events before and the story is being retold because the scene has left the storyteller uneasy. As the storyteller recalls the past both the listener and the teller see events in a new light. Both are working through troubled times in search of meaning. In the case of To Kill a Mockingbird the first-person retelling is not pleasant, but the underlying significance is with the narrative. The youthful personalities who are recalled are hopeful. Scout tells us of a time past when white people would lynch or convict a man because of the color of his skin. She also shows us three children who refuse to believe that the system is right, and she leaves us with the thought that most people will be nice if seen for what they are: humans with frailties. When discussing literary criticism, Theo D'Haen suggested that the good literary work should have a life within the world and be "part of the ongoing activities of that world" (4). To Kill a Mockingbird continues to have life within the world; its ongoing activities in the realm of censorship show that it is a book which deals with regional moralism. The children in the story seem very human; they worry about their own identification, they defy parental rules, and they cry over injustices. They mature in Harper Lee's novel, and they lose their innocence. So does the reader. If the readers are young, they may believe Scout when she says, "nothin's real scary except in books" (Lee, 254). If the readers are older they will have learned that life is as scary, and they will be prepared to meet some of its realities.

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The Censor Within[1]

A couple of years ago a high school English teacher received a call from an angry parent who insisted that The Scarlet Letter be removed from the school curriculum for seniors.

"Oh," the teacher said, trying to be mildly sympathetic to the parent's concern, "you object to the theme of adultery being handled in the classroom?"

"That has nothing to do with it," the parent shouted. "They criticize a minister in that book!"

We, who are professionals dealing with books for young people, are amused. . .if wryly. The parent's request is so clearly out of order. The Scarlet Letter, after all, is a classic.

But how do we, librarians and teachers, editors and writers, deal with such issues when they crop up in our own minds? Do we require the books that we present to our children to be one-hundred per cent "pure" or "right"? Our pure and our right? Is the, perhaps more sophisticated, standard by which we judge books much of a step up from that parent's complaint?

When I write a novel for young people—when I write anything at all for any audience whatsoever, for that matter—I am deeply concerned about the moral stance represented by the work as a whole. I am not particularly worried about the aberrations of individual characters such as Pop Beck, the religious fanatic/child molester in Foster Child. What evil the character may represent, he must be viewed in the light of the thematic whole. I am no more condemning all Christians through Pop Beck's abuse of his faith than I would be advocating murder if I wrote a story in which a murder occurred. But for me as a writer, that the ultimate stance of a piece of fiction be positive and moral is of the utmost importance, which is why I try to build in careful balances for the negatives represented by some characters or some action. And yet I am not at all sure that the moral stance a book presents is a primary, or even useful, criterion by which to judge fiction.

There are many fine books with which I happen to personally disagree, even dramatically so, not with the actions or words of individual characters but with the statement implied or made directly by the book as a whole.

Sylvia Louise Engdall, in her fantasies, continually totals actions up to support the implied or sometimes presented statement, "The end justifies the means." I find the statement simplistic at best, dangerous at worst.

I think Natalie Babbitt is one of the finest craftspeople writing today. Her novel Tuck Everlasting, is a gem and a classic and, even if she had written nothing else, would give her a lasting place among writers. However, I find the theme of Kneeknock Rise, another of her stories, to be offensive. The statement I read from the story is that it doesn't matter what people believe in, so long as they believe something. That is a popular idea in twentieth century American culture, but it is one I could hardly disagree with more profoundly. What we believe is of the greatest importance because we are created by our beliefs. I don't mean whether we are Christian or Jew or Buddhist, though surely we are shaped in important ways by that choice which was usually made for us. I mean whether we choose to believe in a Hitler or a Gandhi. I mean whether, within those larger faiths, each one capable of producing much good, we choose a narrow track that teaches hatred and separateness or a deeper one that connects us with the whole of the human race. I think Natalie Babbitt has made a fairly surface statement out of her own feelings of contempt for blind believers without examining the deeper implications of her view.

Robert Cormier has written several highly regarded novels for young adults, and they deserve the regard they have received. When I first read them, I wished that they did not. His dominant theme seems not to change, particularly, from book to book but is dreadfully clear in The Chocolate War. Everybody, he demonstrates carefully, in a position of any kind of power is evil, and it is an evil one is quite powerless to fight. Anyone who tries will be destroyed, physically, psychologically, in every way it is possible to be destroyed.

When I first read The Chocolate War, I was appalled. What kind of statement was this to make to children . . . to anyone, for that matter? I was righteously indignant. Here was the kind of book to point out to librarians and teachers as requring a second or even third thought. Did it belong on the shelves for our young people? I would, I decided, ask my son, Peter, to read it and find out what he thought.

Peter, who is a voracious reader, never did read The Chocolate War for me. He and I had always fed one another books, but at the the time I plied him with that one he had just arrived at the age when he no longer wanted to read mother-recommended fare, so I had to go before the groups of children's book professionals I often find myself lecturing to without Peter's considered opinion. But it occurred to me, somewhere along the line, that there was a built-in contradiction in my concern. Why, if I thought that young people needed to be protected from the negativism of such a view, was my first thought to offer the book to my own son? Did I think he was somehow, invulnerable to what might be damaging to others the same age? Not really. He is a bright, perceptive reader but a very normal boy and, in fact, a deeply sensitive one. If anything, he would probably have gotten more of the full impact of the story than a reader of another kind might have gleaned. Then what was disturbing me about the book?

What it came down to, after careful thought, was that I wouldn't have written such a book. And the only response I could make to that realization was. . .so? What difference did it make if Mr. Cormier's view of the world was different from mine? What difference did it make if children were presented with a glimpse of a world, even , that I considered less than wholesome? Would they be contaminated, somehow profoundly altered by what they saw? I thought it highly unlikely. I hardly would have offered the book to my own son if that had been my concern.

And there was another point to be considered. Fiction, especially good fiction, can be counted on to be almost infinitely various. The best antidote to bad television is rarely more television because the kind and quality of the badness repeats itself endlessly, perhaps escalates over the years. There is a sameness to most commercial television programming that can be counted on to perpetuate itself. But the best antidote I know to fictional ideas that seem distorted or contrary to community standards is more fiction reading, more experiencing of the world through other created characters' eyes because the balance will inevitably be found. The balance to the hopelessness of Robert Cormier lies in the firmly grounded faith of Madeleine L'Engle, to the stark realism of Paul Zindel, in the humor of Betsy Byars, or the fantasy of Susan Cooper. If Robert Cormier . . .or I, for that matter, wrote everything that was to be made available for our young people, those young people would be sadly, perhaps dangerously deprived. But we don't, and the children are not merely safe but richer for having their vision of the world broadened.

I have always noticed that those people who are intent upon withholding information from children are the ones with the least understanding about what children do with knowledge. (If we give them sex education, they will immediately go out and try sex.) Granted, children are engaged in the process of forming their perceptions, but the perceptions they form are not going to be made up substantially out of books. We might, in many cases, be better off as a society if they were. They are going to be created, first and foremost, out of the implicit, often unacknowledged, attitudes of their parents and other important adults, second from the attitudes of their peers, third probably from television, movies, advertisements, and in some special cases books may form a poor last.

Those of us who love books have played into the censor's hands by treating books as if they were holy, as if they were, in fact, capable of changing a reader's life in one fell swoop. In real life, books confirm or fail to confirm the view of the world we already have. If they fail to confirm, they give us food for thought if we are inclined toward thought; they are rejected out of hand if we are not. I think it hardly needs to be said that in most instances information that doesn't fit the world a child—or adult—already knows is simply discarded.

But what about the child who takes an idea quite contrary to what he or she sees exampled through his parents' lives and thinks about it? Such a thing does happen upon occasion, and thought, let us make no mistake, is a dangerous activity. Totalitarian societies know that well. Certain elements within our culture which stand against the mainstream of the culture know it, too, and are deeply frightened.

I don't blame them. It would be a difficult task to rear children to oppose the values of the culture in which they were born, to surround them strongly enough and constantly enough to keep them from being lured by ideas contrary to one's own. It is, in fact, the price those people pay for living in a free society, not one which forces upon all people a single set of beliefs. Obviously that price is easier for me to pay if I am in large part in agreement with the pervasive ideas that freedom allows into view. We all need to feel empathetic with the family for whom that is not true. Their task is a difficult one and one filled with pitfalls, not the least of which may be, from time to time, a book.

But while we are feeling empathetic, it is imperative that we not give over our freedom—or that of our children—to help make their task easier. Thought, even painful thought, even thought that calls into question basic attitudes and values, is the very cornerstone of a democratic society. Books, particularly novels, form only a small piece of that thoughtful process, but every small piece must be protected if our freedom is to survive.

Next, however, comes the crucial question: are the freedoms intended for adults in our society applicable to children, too? Or are our children in a separate category, more like inviolable property than individuals in their own right? The jury is still out on that question, and though I know the decision I think should be made. . .must be made, I don't know what we will finally decide.

And perhaps most basic of all, are our children deeply flawed beings who will try every door opened to them if it leads to trouble, or are they different in stature and sophistication from us, but not in kind? Or is it ourselves we fail to trust?

If, in that first and largest censorship which occurs in the librarians' purchasing power, we are to eliminate those books with which we do not agree, where do we begin? More important, where do we end?

Recently a young woman told a friend of mine of a series of events from her early childhood. She had, repeatedly over a period of months, attempted to kill herself. She tried to smother herself with a pillow, to drown herself, to hang herself. She jumped off of something high. Her poor parents were at their wit's end, but it never occurred to anyone to try to get at the cause of this strange behavior, or if they tried, she hid her secret well. In fact, the young woman had only recently explained the whole thing to her family. She had been deeply impressed by the book The Littlest Angel and had made a firm decision after reading it. She wanted to die while she was still a child so she could be a small angel in heaven. She didn't want to be one of those sedate, proper adult angels and spend eternity in predictable adult boredom. Shall we ban The Littlest Angel from our schools, our libraries and book stores because of that little girl, who, incidentally, grew up to become a librarian?

Fiction must be judged according to its literary integrity, not by its moral "rightness," by whatever set of values that rightness is perceived. In the first place, my right may well be someone else's clear wrong. In the second place, if our children don't begin to learn to pick and choose among written ideas while they still have support and guidance, they may be dupes for every written idea that falls before their eyes when they are on their own in the world.

Children are given to us to love and to teach. Inevitably we do both imperfectly. But if we give them all we have, holding back nothing, including books, we can hope they will be prepared for this imperfect world.

Marion Dane Bauer

Marion Dane Bauer is the author of Shelter From the Wind (1976), Foster Child (1977), Tangled Butterfly (1983), Rain of Fire (1983), and Like Mother, Like Daughter (Fall, 1985).

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